

2002

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Hilltoppers win season opener

By ROB HERBST

The Daily News

Western Kentucky University baseball coach Joel Murrie couldn't complain about anything Friday.

The weather miraculously turned pleasant for his Hilltoppers' season opener against Western Illinois, his ace pitcher Ryan Biconda threw seven shutout innings and WKU's Nick Turner and David Lower each belted out home runs.

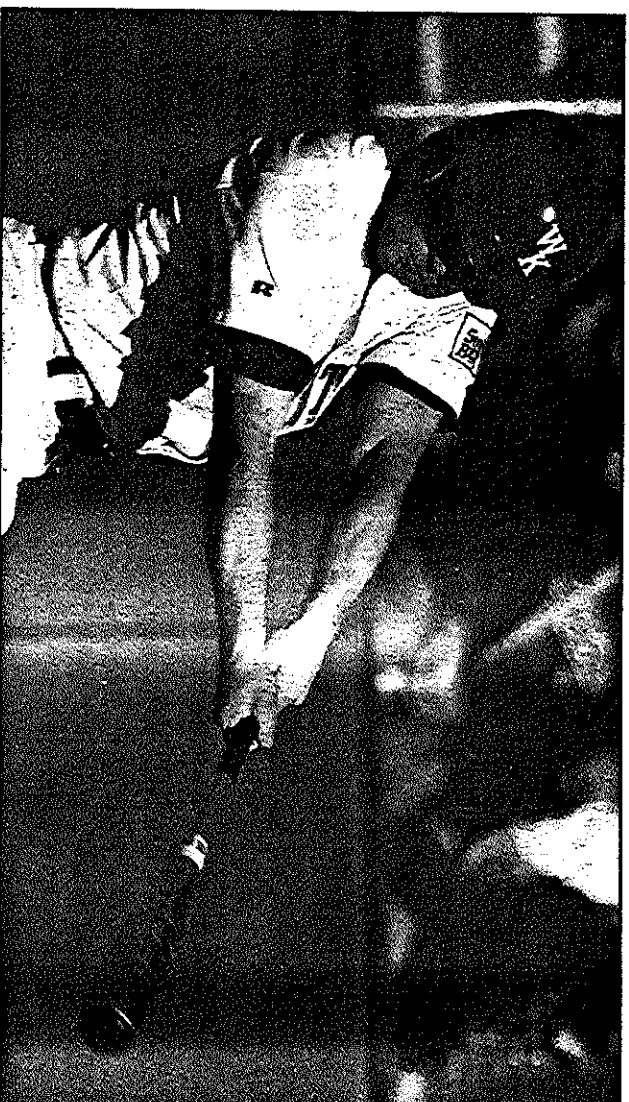
All that equaled an 11-0 Hilltopper thumping of the Leathernecks at Nick Denes Field. "It was really a great day," Murrie said. "For a while it was as good a college baseball game that can be expected."

After leading 2-0 through four innings, the Hilltoppers took control with a six-run fifth inning. Western Illinois helped the Hilltoppers' cause by committing three errors and Western Kentucky took advantage.

Matt Johnston hit a two-run single that scored Travis Brown and Jerry Cecil. Then Turner crushed a three-run homer over the left field fence and Ryan Arnett followed up with a run-scoring single.

That lead was plenty enough for Biconda.

"I've been there and I know what it feels like when it's an eight-run game and a guy like



Daily News/Clinton Lewis

Western Kentucky left fielder David Lower drills the Hilltoppers' first home run of the baseball season against Western Illinois pitcher Shay Butler on Friday at Nick Denes Field.

Biconda is on the mound," Murrie said. "It really feels like an uphill challenge."

Because it was the season-opener, Biconda was on a strict pitch-count limit. He was held to only 82 pitches, but still was able to go seven innings. He scattered seven hits in those innings and didn't walk any. "It was really the ideal situation," Murrie said. "We got some

quality innings from him and I'm sure he would've wanted to finish the game. He's a competitor. But we didn't want to waste him with a full season left. There's a lot of baseball to be played."

Relief pitchers Grady Hinchman and Matt Wilhite finished the game with two scoreless innings and Western continued to roll with three more runs over the

seventh and eighth innings.

The Hilltoppers (1-0) continue their three-game series against Western Illinois with a 1 p.m. matchup today. The two westerns conclude their series with another 1 p.m. on Sunday.

Western Illinois 000 000-0 7 4
Western Kentucky 110 060 12x-11 8 1
WP — Biconda (1-0) LP — Butler, HR — Lower (1), Turner (1).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2002

Hilltoppers complete the sweep

WKU baseball off to 3-0 start

By MICHAEL COMPTON

For The Daily News

Senior third baseman Tanner Townsend had one hit in his first four at-bats Sunday, but still wasn't satisfied.

After hitting left-handed the first four, Townsend decided to try Western Illinois starter Nate Volk from the right side. The move paid off as Townsend took a 2-1 pitch off the elbow and scored two batters later, to give Western a 3-2 win and a sweep of its season-opening series against the Leathernecks.

After two days of easy victories, head coach Joel Murrie said he was pleased by his team's performance.

"It's interesting because we had our more veteran pitchers on the mound the last two days with really high run production and a lot of innings that were low pressured," Murrie said. "Then we turn around today and we have one of our youngest pitchers on the mound in a very tough, close ballgame where every pitch was important. I was pleased with our pitching staff today."

The Leathernecks (0-3) got on the board first in the top of the second.

Junior shortstop Travis Brown booted a routine grounder by Western Illinois' Pete Tronick. Bryan Hinson tried a sacrifice bunt, but Brown was forced at second base. Hinson advanced to second on a ground out and scored on Garrett Hood's single to right-center field.

Western Kentucky answered in the bottom of the inning when Brown drilled a rope over the left field fence for a two-run home run, giving the Hilltoppers a 2-1 advantage.

The pitching staffs took control of the game from there.

Sophomore Andy Baldwin - making his first start for Western Kentucky - went six innings, allowing two hits and striking out five. In addition to the cold weather, Baldwin also had to battle through an ankle sprain after he turned it covering first base in the fourth inning.

"It's still sore," Baldwin said. "I rolled it pretty good."

Freshman J.C. Faircloth relieved Baldwin in the seventh and allowed one hit - a game-tying home run by Jeff Wellwood with two outs in the eighth inning.

Volk was equally impressive, allowing six hits in nine and two-thirds innings.

"The opposing pitcher threw a (heck) of a game," Baldwin said. "It makes it tough because you can't make mistakes and you have to be just as good to give your team a chance to win."

The Hilltoppers did just that as Townsend started the game winning rally in the bottom of the 10th. Junior catcher Kevin Beardon followed and drew a walk. After the Leathernecks went to the bullpen, senior designated hitter Jeff Pacholke stroked a 1-2 pitch over first base, deep enough to score Townsend.

Townsend said Western needed a hard-fought win.

"We didn't play well at all today," Townsend said. "We didn't hit well and our defense wasn't the best in the world. But it was important to gut this out and gain confidence."

Western returns to action Friday night when they travel to San Diego to face San Diego State and head coach Tony Gwynn.

Western Ky. baseball team falls to San Diego State

By the Daily News FEB 17 2002
The Western Kentucky baseball team lost its first game of the season 17-3 to San Diego State on Friday at Tony Gwynn Stadium.

Over the next four innings, the WKU bats were unable to produce any runs. The Aztecs' offense, meanwhile, came alive to score two runs in the second, four in the third and one in the fifth to claim a 7-1 lead.

After a scoreless fifth inning, Western cut the lead to five when the Aztecs' infield committed two errors to give WKU two on with one out. Ryan Arnett singled to left field, scoring Turner to make it a 7-2 game.

That was as close as WKU got, however, as SDSU scored five runs in the bottom of the fifth to put the game away with a fifth to put the game away with a

commanding 13-2 lead. Shortell earned the victory, improving to 2-1 on the year. He pitched seven innings, giving up two runs off six hits with five strikeouts.

WKU used five pitchers who gave up a combined 16 hits. Miller earned the loss to drop his record to 0-1. The Hilltoppers were to return to action Saturday against Oregon State in the first game of a doubleheader. That afternoon game was to be followed with a nightcap against SDSU.

Western Kentucky 100 001 010-3 8 2
San Diego State 124 103 042-17 16 3
WP - Shortell (2-1), LP - Miller (0-1).

Hilltoppers snap skid with 13-2 win

The Western Kentucky baseball team snapped a three-game losing skid Friday, pounding out 14 hits to claim a 13-2 victory over Asbury (Ky.) College at Nick Denes Field.

In the bottom of the first, the Hilltoppers took advantage of a Rafael Vallejo walk and stolen base. Jeff Pacholke launched a triple to deep center field, plating Vallejo to put WKU up 1-0.

Vallejo and Pacholke each tallied three hits on the day.

Western looked to add to its lead in the bottom of the second when Matt Wilhite ripped a double down the left field line for one of his two hits and advanced to third base on a wild pitch by Eagle starter Mark Evans. Kenneth Yaeger stepped up and scored Wilhite on a sacrifice fly to left and Brian Polson later scored one more for the Toppers to make it a 3-0 game.

Asbury answered with two runs in the top of the third, but WKU scored four runs off five hits in the bottom of the inning to put the game out of reach.

WKU starting pitcher Brooks Sketo earned his first career victory, giving up two runs off one hit with three strikeouts in four innings.

Hilltopper reliever Adam Prida shut down the Eagle bats, recording consecutive 1-2-3 innings in the fifth and sixth. He struck out the side in the fifth and finished the day with four strikeouts in three innings.

The Hilltoppers return to action at noon today in a doubleheader against Illinois State at Nick Denes Field.

Asbury 002 000 00 - 2 3 4
Western Kentucky 124 010 05 - 13 14 0
Win - Sketo (1-0). Loss - Evans (0-1). HR - Towns.

- Staff reports

Western wins thriller over Kentucky 6-5

Rockie Castillo's three-run inside-the-park home run Saturday helped lead Western Kentucky to a 6-5, come-from-behind softball victory over instate rival Kentucky at the Sonic Challenge in Chattanooga, Tenn.

The Hilltoppers (6-3) and Wildcats (8-7) both are 3-1 after the second day of the event, trailing undefeated Tennessee-Chattanooga and Samford.

The Hilltoppers were behind 5-3 entering their final at bat in the top of the seventh inning. Shelly Floyd started the rally with a leadoff walk, then Jessie Richardson hit the first pitch she saw over replacement left-fielder Brook Bowman to put runners on second and third. Castillo worked a full count before lining another ball over Bowman, which got caught in a sign on the outfield fence. When Bowman picked up the ball, umpires ruled a home run for Castillo, who had never stopped running.

The right-hander then worked out of a seventh-inning jam to earn her first victory on The Hill. She walked Lyndsey Angus and gave up a single to Angie Dal Pozzo to start the final frame, but retired the next three batters without allowing the ball to leave the infield to close it out.

The Hilltoppers will take on Birmingham-Southern (3:45 p.m. CST) and host Tennessee-Chattanooga (7 p.m.) today, the final day of the tournament.

Beth Enk had career highs of three hits and two RBIs and Kristalyn Smith threw her first shutout in more than a year Saturday afternoon to lead Western Kentucky to an 8-0, six-inning softball victory over Liberty at the Sonic Challenge in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Enk was 3-for-4.

Smith retired 15 of the first 18 batters she faced and allowed three hits and a pair of walks while fanning three.

Liberty 000 000-0 3 3
WKU 000 035-8 9 1
WP - Smith (2-1), LP - Hurley (3-4).
WKU 100 020 3-6 8 3
UK 004 001 0-5 6 0
WP - Castillo (1-2), LP - Marr (2-5), HR - WKU, Castillo (1), Silver (1).

- Staff reports

Daily News Feb. 23, 2002

Daily News FEB 24 2002

Daily News FEB 25 2002

Tops notch another sweep at home

The Western Kentucky baseball team used an eight-strikeout performance from starting pitcher Andy Baldwin and a three-RBI day from Tanner Townsend (Sr., London) to earn a 10-3 triumph over Illinois State (0-3) Sunday at Nick Denes Field.

With the win, the Hilltoppers (7-4) sweep an opponent at home for the second time this season, and are now on a four-game winning streak.

"I challenged our club to play well at home," WKU coach Joel Murrie said. "I wanted them to concentrate on execution and they certainly did that this weekend."

The Hilltoppers are back in action Wednesday as they take on Louisville at 2 p.m.

— Staff reports

Page 28 — SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2002

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Western baseball splits doubleheader

The Western Kentucky baseball team split a doubleheader with Dayton on Saturday at Nick Denes Field.

The Hilltoppers scored two runs in the seventh and final inning to claim a 7-6, come-from-behind victory in Game 1, but had a second comeback attempt fall just short as the Flyers won the second contest 6-4.

The Hilltoppers (10-4) began their comeback when Nick Turner tied the score in the seventh with an RBI single to center.

Later in the inning, WKU loaded the bases and Dayton brought in reliever Howard Corona to get out of the jam only to see him walk in the winning run.

Hilltopper starter Ryan Bicondoa pitched 4.1 innings, giving up six runs on eight hits. Franklin-Simpson High School product Matt Wilhite earned the win, tossing 2.2 innings of scoreless relief while improving to 3-0.

Dayton grabbed the early lead in Game 2, scoring all six runs in the top of the fourth.

J.C. Faircloth earned his first loss of the season, giving up six runs on eight hits to fall to 2-1.

Today's series finale begins at 1 p.m. at Nick Denes Field.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Hilltoppers rally for 3-2 win over ECU

Ryan Cattell's double to left-center in the bottom of the eighth inning scored David Lower and Tanner Townsend to lead Western Kentucky's baseball team to a 3-2 comeback win over Eastern Kentucky on Tuesday at Nick Denes Field.

With the victory, the Hilltoppers (11-5) snap a two-game losing skid. ECU dropped its sixth straight contest, falling to 1-8.

Ryan Bicondoa shut the door on the Colonels in the ninth to earn his first save of the season.

Western starter Grady Hinchman tossed six innings, giving up two runs (one earned) on two hits. Chris Conley pitched a scoreless seventh and eighth to earn his second win and improve to 2-0 on the year.

The Hilltoppers will be back in action to host Valparaiso at 2 p.m. today at Denes Field.

Eastern Kentucky 100 010 000-2 4 0
Western Kentucky 100 000 02x-3 3 2
WP - Conley (2-0), LP - Goetz (1-1),
Save - Bicondoa (1).

Western baseball gets rained out

Western Kentucky coach Joel Murrie was forced to wait to pick up his 600th win.

Friday's scheduled 3 p.m. baseball game between WKU and Bowling Green State was postponed due to substantially wet field conditions and forecasted inclement weather.

The two teams will now play a doubleheader Saturday, beginning at 1 p.m. at Nick Denes Field. Game one will be a seven-inning contest, while game two, beginning approximately 30 minutes after the conclusion of game one, is set for nine innings.

Murrie's career record is 699-554-5.

Daily News Mar. 16, 2002

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Joel Murrie going for 700th career win

The Western Kentucky baseball team will try to earn head coach Joel Murrie his 700th career win this weekend in a three-game series against Bowling Green State, beginning today at 3 p.m. at Nick Denes Field.

The Hilltoppers (12-5) and Falcons (4-7) will battle again Saturday at 2 p.m., before concluding the series Sunday in a 1 p.m. start. The series will mark the end of a season-long 14-game homestand for the Hilltoppers.

WKU is coming off a pair of wins in its first two mid-week games of the season, claiming a 3-2 comeback victory over Eastern Kentucky on Tuesday, and a 9-5 triumph over Valparaiso on Wednesday.

Against EKV, Ryan Cattell's double to left-center scored David Lower and Tanner Townsend to give the Hilltoppers the win. Townsend collected three hits, including two solo home runs, along with four RBIs in the victory over Valpo.

The Hilltoppers' and Falcons' only prior meeting was in 1985, with WKU earning a 2-1 triumph at Denes Field.

Murrie is in his 23rd season as head coach of the Hilltoppers, and is the all-time winningest coach at Western with a 699-554-5 overall record.

Baseball game canceled

By the Daily News

Western Kentucky's scheduled baseball game at Murray State today has been canceled due to inclement weather. No make up date has been deter-

mined.

The Hilltoppers return to action on Friday as it opens Sun Belt Conference play with a 6 p.m. game at Arkansas-Little Rock.

Briefly*From staff and wire reports.***WKU baseball to open Sun Belt play**

After winning 14 of its first 20 games, the Western Kentucky baseball team begins Sun Belt Conference play at 6 p.m. CST Friday in the first of a three-game series at Arkansas Little-Rock.

The Hilltoppers (14-6) and Trojans (13-12) will battle again at 2 p.m. Saturday before concluding the series Sunday in a 1 p.m. start at Curran Conway Park. The contest is the Hilltoppers' first road game in just over a month (Feb. 16 at San Diego State), ending a 14-game homestand in which Western went 11-3.

Last week, WKU claimed four victories in five games, including a 3-2 win over Eastern Kentucky on March 12, followed by a 9-5 triumph over Valparaiso on March 13.

Over the weekend, the Hilltoppers hosted Bowling Green State in a three-game series, winning two, including head coach Joel Murrie's 700th career victory in a 6-2 triumph Saturday. Tanner Townsend led the Hilltoppers, batting .500 with two home runs and six RBIs in the five games.

The Trojans enter the series having lost their last eight games, all away from home, including a 4-6 setback Tuesday at Louisiana-Monroe. Last weekend at the Irish Classic in San Antonio, UALR dropped a 5-7 decision to Notre Dame in between a pair of 7-0, 6-4 losses to Creighton.

Western finished fourth in league play a year ago, posting a 14-13 record, while the Trojans finished seventh with a 12-15 mark.

The Hilltoppers took two of three from the Trojans last season, claiming the series win after a pair of 9-3, 7-4 victories in the first two games. UALR bounced back in Game 3, jumping out to a 15-0 lead before winning 15-3.

WKU leads the all-time series 25-16-0.

Briefly*From staff and wire reports.***Western baseball team beats UALR**

Led by a 14-strikeout, complete-game performance from Ryan Bicondoa (Sr., Lovelock, Nev.), the Western Kentucky baseball team opened Sun Belt Conference play with an 8-3 triumph over host Arkansas-Little Rock Friday at Curran Conway Park.

The Hilltoppers (15-6, 1-0 SBC) have now won their last three contests, while the Trojans (13-13, 0-1 SBC) drop their ninth-straight with the loss.

In the top of the first, WKU took the early lead when Tanner Townsend walked, and Nick Turner singled, both with two outs. After Townsend scored on an error by Trojan catcher Brent Champion, Trevor Keesling plated Turner with a single to center, giving the Toppers a 2-0 advantage.

After UALR made it a 2-1 game in the bottom of the first, the Toppers added another pair of two-out runs in the top of the second when Townsend reached on an error by first-baseman Brodie Ward, and Ryan Cattell followed with a single to enter. Keesling stepped up and drove-in his second and third runs of the contest with another single to center, making it a 4-1 game.

The Toppers scored two more in the third and in the fifth, highlighted by a pair of Cattell RBI-singles to give Western an 8-1 lead.

The Trojans picked up a pair of runs in the eighth, but that was as close as they got as Bicondoa shut down UALR in the ninth to seal the win.

Bicondoa gave up three runs (two earned) on eight hits while striking-out a season-high 14 batters in the complete-game effort to improve to 2-2 on the year.

Game two of the series takes place Saturday, beginning at 2 p.m. at Curran Conway Park.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

UALR comes back to defeat Western

Arkansas-Little Rock used a three-run eighth inning to come from behind and defeat Western Kentucky 8-6 Saturday in the second matchup of a three-game series at Curran Conway Park in Little Rock, Ark.

The win snapped a nine-game losing streak for the Trojans (14-13, 1-1 in the Sun Belt Conference) and is the first loss in four contests for the Hilltoppers (15-7, 1-1 SBC).

WKU got on the board first, scoring a single run in the top of the first inning when Ryan Cattell launched his third home run of the season over the left-field wall to give the Hilltoppers the early 1-0 lead.

UALR took the lead in the bottom half of the first, plating two runs courtesy of an RBI double by Kevin Kouzmanoff that tied the score and a Derek Santangelo RBI single to give the Trojans a 2-1 advantage.

Western answered in the top of the second, plating three runs without a single hit. Ryan Arnett scored when Tanner Townsend was hit by Trojan starter Bennett Cromer with the bases loaded. Travis Brown then took advantage of a bases-loaded walk to cross home plate and make it a 3-2 Hilltopper lead. WKU made it a 4-2 game courtesy of another Trojan mishap, as David Lower scored on a passed ball.

The Hilltoppers retained their lead until the bottom of the fourth when UALR scored three runs highlighted by an Adam Coleman RBI single that brought the Trojans within two. With two outs, UALR took the lead, plating two runs on a wild pitch by WKU starter J.C. Faircloth to make it 5-4.

After a scoreless fifth, Western knotted the score at five in the top of the sixth when Lower scored from second on a Townsend RBI single to left.

With neither squad to move ahead in the seventh, Lower put the Hilltoppers back in the lead in the top of the eighth with an RBI single that scored Trevor Keesling to make it a 6-5 game.

The Hilltoppers' lead was short-lived, however.

The Trojans scored three runs in the bottom of the eighth, highlighted by a Kouzmanoff double that plated two runs. UALR held off the Hilltopper rally in the top of the ninth, retiring WKU 1-2-3 to preserve the win.

UALR used four pitchers to give up a combined four hits, with Brad Cherry earning the win to improve to 1-1.

Faircloth allowed five runs on eight hits in 3 2/3 innings. Andy Baldwin earned the loss, giving up two runs on three hits to fall to 2-3 on the season.

The Hilltoppers and Trojans conclude the series at 1 p.m. CST today at Curran Conway Park.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

UALR takes series against Toppers

Leftfielder John Gragg went 3-for-5 at the plate to lead Arkansas-Little Rock past Western Kentucky, 7-3, in the finale of a three-game conference series Sunday at Curran Conway Park. The win is the Trojans (15-13, 2-1 Sun Belt Conference) second straight, while the Hilltoppers (15-8, 1-2) have now dropped their last two after winning Friday's opener.

WKU began the scoring in the top of the fourth inning when Tanner Townsend hit a lead-off double down the left-field line. Two batters later, Nick Turner brought Townsend home with an RBI double to left, and later scored on a Patrick Ransdell double to deep center to give Western the early 2-0 lead.

The Trojans answered in their half of the fourth, plating four runs in the inning, highlighted by RBI singles from Kris Wheeler and Adam Coleman to put UALR ahead, 4-2.

After a scoreless fifth, the Trojans added to their lead, scoring three more runs on three hits to make it a 7-2 contest heading into the final three stanzas.

In the top of the eighth, Townsend got the rally started with a lead-off walk, and Trevor Keesling reached on a fielder's choice to put two on with one out. After Townsend was out at second, Ransdell stepped up and singled to center, plating Keesling to cut the lead to four.

That was as close as the Toppers would come, though, as the Trojans retired WKU in the ninth to claim the 7-3 victory.

UALR starter Aaron Carter (2-3) got the win, giving up three runs on seven hits while striking out eight in 7 2/3 innings of work.

Brandon Miller got the nod for Western, allowing seven runs (five earned) on nine hits in 5 1/3 innings, but fell to 0-2 on the year. Grady Hinchman tossed 2 2/3 scoreless in relief for the Toppers.

The Hilltoppers return home to host Murray State on Tuesday at Nick Denes Field. Action begins at 6 p.m.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Western baseball has game postponed

Friday's scheduled 6 p.m. baseball game between Western Kentucky University and Arkansas State has been postponed due to inclement weather conditions. The two teams will battle in a doubleheader Saturday, beginning at 1 p.m.

Sunday's series finale is still scheduled for a 1 p.m. (CST) start.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Western baseball to play ASU in DH

For the second straight day, the Western Kentucky baseball team's Sun Belt Conference match-up with Arkansas State has been rained out.

The two teams were originally scheduled to meet in a three-game series beginning Friday, but rain has forced the cancellation of Friday and Saturday's matchups.

Saturday's cancellation is the third straight game the Hilltoppers have lost to inclement weather.

Western and Arkansas State will now play just two games in the series, beginning today at 1 p.m. The doubleheader will feature a nine-inning game followed by a seven-inning contest, which will begin about 30 minutes after the conclusion of the first game.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Western baseball wins pair at ASU

After a series of postponements and schedule changes, the rain finally went away and the Western Kentucky baseball team got its conference series underway. Sunday at Arkansas State, the Hilltoppers claimed wins of 7-3 and 7-4 at Tomlinson Stadium-Kell Field in Jonesboro, Ark.

Ryan Bicondoa set the tone in the bottom of the first inning as he struck out the side.

In the top of the second, the Hilltoppers got on the board when Trevor Keesling scored on a double steal to make it 1-0.

Western added to its lead in the top of the third when Ryan Cattell smashed a two-out RBI double to right to make it a 2-0 contest. Jeff Pacholke added another, scoring Cattell with a single to left. Keesling followed with his first home run of the season, a two-run shot over the left-field wall to give WKU a 5-0 lead.

WKU won Game 2 as it scored six runs over the first two innings and held off the Indians.

The Hilltoppers return to action Tuesday as they host Austin Peay at 6 p.m.



Joe Imel/Daily News

Western Kentucky's Travis Brown avoids the tag at home plate Sunday by Florida International catcher Tommy Duenas in the Toppers' 8-6 win at Nick Denes Field.

Tops sweep ranked FIU

By OJ STAPLETON APR 08 2012

The Daily News

ojstapleton@bgdailynews.com/783-3239

The Western Kentucky baseball team earned a series sweep over No. 23 Florida International by notching an 8-6 win on Sunday.

The win improved Western's overall record to 22-8, but more importantly, upped its Sun Belt Conference mark to 6-2. The Hilltoppers are currently second in the league behind South Alabama, which is 6-1 after a 3-2 loss at New Orleans on Sunday.

"Any sweep in a conference series is not only unique, it's also hard to do," said WKU coach Joel Murrie. "I don't care who you're playing. We just played outstanding baseball. Our conference barometer is about as high as you can get, and I think that is a reflection on our players being more relaxed and thinking more."

The Hilltoppers had a 5-3 lead heading into the top of the sixth inning, until starting pitcher Kenny Hughes, who was making his first start for WKU, got in a jam.

After getting the first two outs of the inning, Hughes gave up a single to designated hitter Daniel Bustamante, which brought up FIU slugger Brad Eldred.

The 6-foot-5, 245 pound left fielder had homered in each of the three games against



Joe Imel/Daily News

Western's Tanner Townsend rips a single in the Hilltoppers' 8-6 victory.

Western - including a two-run shot in the first inning - so Murrie had Hughes intentionally walk him.

Hughes then beamed Bernard Gonzalez to load the bases and Murrie went to the bullpen, bringing in former Franklin-Simpson High School standout Matt Wilhite.

Wilhite walked Hector Nunez and then gave up a two-run single to Adam Summerell to give FIU a 6-5 lead. Wilhite then struck out Solomon Frieder to end the inning.

"We had a two-run lead and that kid has hit the ball hard all weekend," Murrie said of his decision to walk Eldred. "Gonzalez behind him had not had a hit all weekend and Nunez behind him had only one hit. I thought it was a great percentage move and I would probably do it again."

That was the last offense the Golden Panthers (26-10, 3-6 SBC) were able to manage, as Wilhite settled down and gave up only one hit - a single to catcher Tommy Duenas - over the last three innings.

"He did a phenomenal job from the sixth inning on. That walk is very uncharacteristic of him and the base hit - those things are going to happen. I wouldn't trade those last three innings for any other performance he has given us this season."

Wilhite's dominance gave the Toppers a chance to retake the lead, and they didn't squander it.

Tanner Townsend had an RBI single and Ryan Cattell picked up the eventual game-winning RBI on a sacrifice fly in the bottom

See TOPPERS, 5B

TOPPERS, from 3B

of the sixth.

Freshman Antone Towns, who sat out Sunday with a sore ankle he injured during Saturday's football scrimmage, gave Western an insurance run in the seventh with a pinch hit, sac fly RBI.

The best individual performance of the day came from Townsend. The senior third baseman was 2-for-3 at the plate with three runs scored, two steals and an RBI, but he also had several great defensive plays.

"Tanner is just playing like a four-year starter should be playing," Murrie said. "When a guy comes in and starts as a freshman and has played in Sun Belt tournaments for three years and is a pencil-in guy in the lineup for four years, what else would you expect?"

Western returns to action Tuesday at home against Louisville at 6 p.m. before playing another SBC series this weekend at Middle Tennessee.

Florida International 300 003 000 - 6 9 2
Western Kentucky 201 022 10x - 8 6 0
WP - Wilhite (5-0), LP - Mendez (1-1), HR - Eldred.

Briefly

*From staff and
wire reports.*

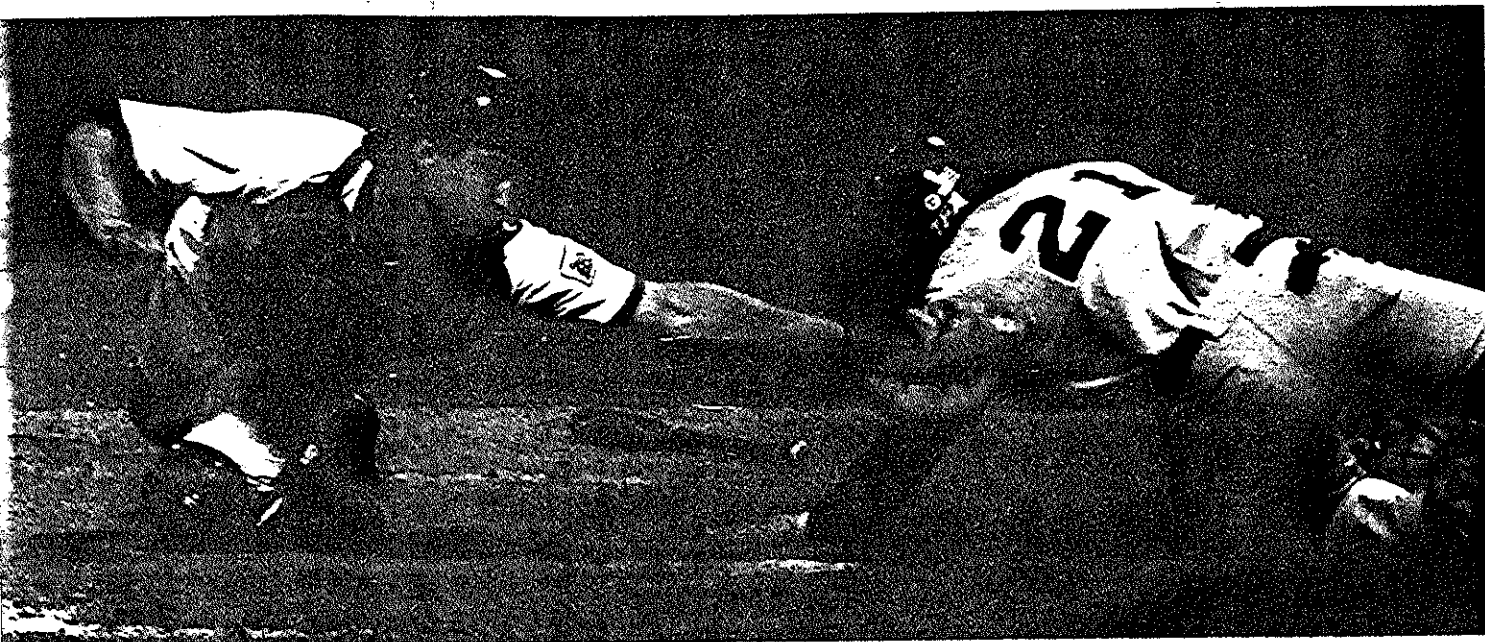
WKU pitcher wins Sun Belt award

Western Kentucky pitcher Ryan Bicondoa was named Sun Belt Conference Pitcher of the Week on Monday.

The honor is the first for the Hilltoppers this season and the second for Bicondoa in his career. He garnered the award last season after tossing a complete-game shutout of Louisiana-Lafayette.

The 6-foot-3 senior right-hander from Lovelock, Nev., narrowly missed pitching his third consecutive complete game as he gave up just two runs on six hits with a career-high tying 14 strikeouts in WKU's 8-2 win over Florida International on Friday. It was his third straight start with double digits in strikeouts and the second time in three outings he has recorded a career-high strikeout total. He fanned at least two batters in six of his 8.1 innings pitched, including three in the sixth.

Western Kentucky 10, Louisville 9



Joe Imel/Daily News

Western Kentucky catcher Ryan Cattell (above, left) tries to tag out Louisville's Fernando Isa as he slides across home plate Tuesday in the Hilltoppers 10-9 win at Nick Denes Field. Western Kentucky pitcher Matt Wilhite (below) winds up Tuesday at Nick Denes Field. Wilhite, a Franklin-Simpson High School product, earned the win for the Hilltoppers to improve his record to 6-0. Western Kentucky has won eight straight and its victory over Louisville on Tuesday snapped a five-game losing streak to the Cardinals that dated back to 1998. The Hilltoppers now are 23-8 on the season.

APR 10 2002

Tops' streak at 8

By MICHEAL COMPTON

The Daily News

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It took a little longer than expected, but the streak continues.

Western Kentucky rallied with two runs in the bottom of the ninth and squeaked past visiting Louisville with a 10-9 win Tuesday at Nick Denes Field.

The win was the Hilltoppers' eighth in a row and snapped a five-game losing streak to the Cardinals that dated back to 1998.

"This was outstanding college baseball," Western coach Joel Murrie said. "There was a lot of good execution on both teams' part. I thought Louisville took advantage of some great two-strike hitting. We might have bent a little bit, but we didn't break."

It was a back-and-forth slugfest that featured six home runs and four lead changes.

Western - 23-8 - got the offense going in the first when third baseman Tanner Townsend blasted his team-leading seventh homer for a 1-0 lead.

The Cardinals - 19-9 - needed four hits to scratch across the tying run in the second. Western averted further dam-

age when left fielder Trevor Keesling nailed Louisville third baseman Mike Budak trying to score from second.

The Hilltoppers weren't as fortunate the next inning.

Louisville plated three runs for a 4-1 advantage. Designated hitter Curt Stewart lined a two-run double down the third base line and scored on a double by Budak.

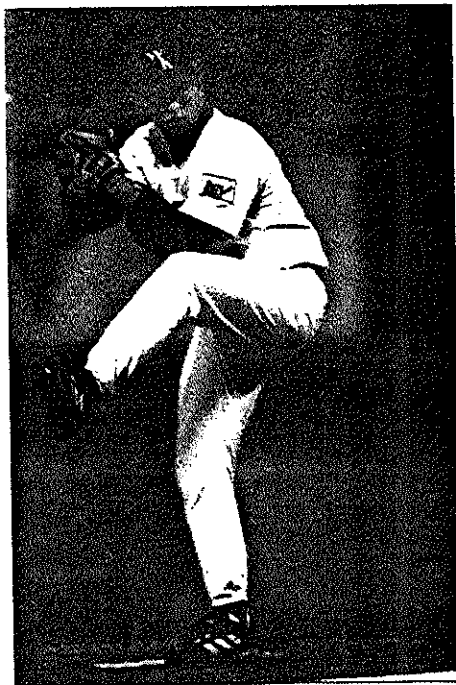
Western responded with a power-packed third inning, when it scored six runs. The offensive spurt started with shortstop Travis Brown's leadoff homer, making the score 4-2 Cardinals.

After center fielder David Lower flied out, Townsend singled for his second hit. Two batters later, Townsend scored on a hit-and-run as DH Jeff Pacholke dropped a single past a diving Budak.

Antone Towns then reached on an error by Louisville second baseman J.T. LaFountain. Catcher Ryan Cattell scored on the play and the game was tied 4-4. First baseman Nick Turner followed with an RBI groundout to give WKU a 5-4 lead.

Trevor Keesling followed with a single to left. Towns scored when Cardinals left fielder Josh Bolen's throw got

See STREAK, 3C



STREAK, from 1C

by catcher Fernando Isa.

Keesling moved to third on the play and scored on a wild pitch, giving the Hilltoppers a 7-4 cushion.

Louisville used the long ball to tie the contest. Right fielder Mark Jurich homered with two out in the fourth, cutting the deficit to 7-5. With a runner on in the seventh, Stewart lashed a long home run to right field for a 7-7 tie.

The Cardinals regained the lead, 8-7, three batters later on a two-out RBI single by shortstop Adam Haley.

The lead was short lived - Townsend's second home run off the night tied the score 8-8.

The Cardinals used the long ball to break the tie in the top of the ninth. Budak stroked a 1-2 pitch over the left field wall, giving Louisville the lead 9-8, heading into the bottom of the ninth.

After pinch hitter Ryan Arnett grounded out, Townsend laid down a bunt single, which started the WKU rally.

"I caught them off guard and I got a good pitch to do it," Townsend said.

Cattell singled and Pacholke walked, loading the bases.

Towns was hit by a pitch, scoring Townsend.

Turner followed with the game-winning single that caromed off the wall in left.

The Louisville native said the game-winning swing against his hometown school was special.

"They overlooked me in high school," Turner said. "Once I was done with junior college, they overlooked me again. It felt really good to get the hit against them."

Townsend paced the Hilltopper

offense with four hits, two homers and three runs scored.

"We were very fortunate to get the big hit in the big inning," Murrie said. "They played outstanding baseball. We took advantage of our opportunity in the ninth."

Western will return to action Friday at 6 p.m., when they begin a three-game series at Middle Tennessee State.

Louisville 013 100 301 - 9 15 2
Western Kentucky 106 000 102 - 10 14 1
WP - Wilhite (6-0), LP - Ring (4-2), HR - Townsend (2), Brown, Jurich, Stewart, Budak

Daily News
APR 05 2002

Hilltopper baseball ready to face FIU

The Western Kentucky University baseball team looks to carry over momentum built from four straight wins as it hosts Florida International in an important Sun Belt Conference series, beginning today at 6 p.m. at Nick Denes Field.

Saturday's game is set for a 2 p.m. start, while Sunday's finale, originally scheduled for 1 p.m., has been moved back to noon to accommodate travel for the visiting Golden Panthers.

•Western Kentucky University head baseball coach Joel Murrie said there is an addition to the 2002 schedule, as the Hilltoppers will host Brescia University Thursday, April 18 at 6 p.m.

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Western baseball inks two recruits

Western Kentucky head baseball coach Joel Murrie announced his fifth and sixth signees for the 2003 recruiting class.

Phillip Thayer, a 5-foot-11, 165-pound middle infielder from Portland, Tenn., will join the Hilltopper squad next year.

The Portland High School product has started every game at shortstop since his freshman year and owns a career .424 batting average.

"Phillip is a fine addition to an already very talented recruiting class," Murrie said. "Many college coaches and professional scouts feel that he is the best middle infielder in the state of Tennessee."

Also joining the Hilltoppers next season is John Carl Kitley, a 6-2, 200-pound infielder from Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, where he batted .389 with six home runs and seven doubles as a junior.

"John Carl is a power hitter with experience at both corners of the infield," Murrie said. "We feel he will be most needed as a first baseman early in his tenure at Western."

Over the summer, Kitley played for the Indiana Bulls where he hit an astonishing .590 with nine doubles and seven home runs - the type of numbers Murrie said will bring some pop to the Hilltopper lineup.

Multisport athlete excelling at WKU

Freshman Antone Towns
playing baseball, football

By **OU STAPLETON/APR 13, 2002**
The Daily News
stapleton@dailynews.com/763-3239

When Antone Towns was deciding where he wanted to go to school, he was looking for one thing in particular.

He wanted to go someplace where he could play both football and baseball.

That place turned out to be Western Kentucky, and football coach Jack Harbaugh and baseball coach Joel Murrie couldn't be happier.

Towns, who signed a football scholarship, has secured the backup quarterback role behind senior Jason Michael and has the makings of an

"exceptionally good" quarterback, even though he's just starting to grow into his role on the football team, according to Harbaugh.

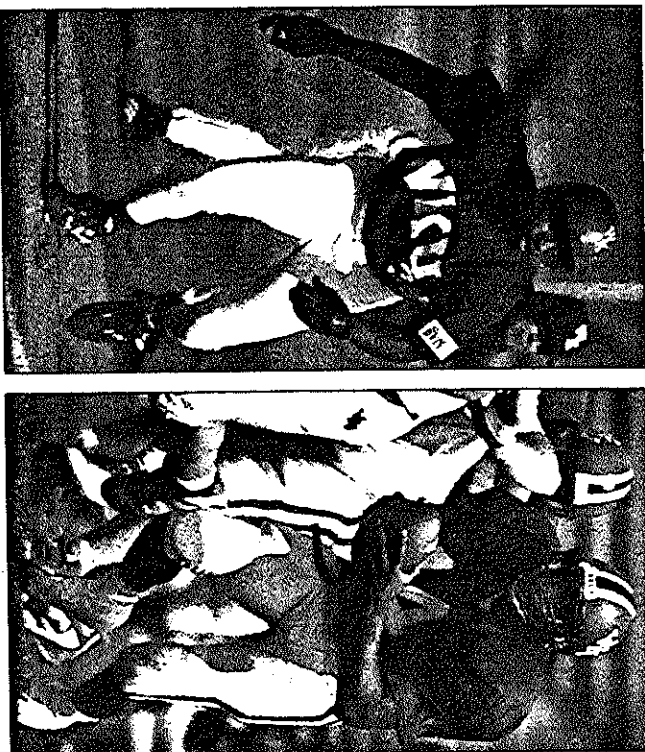
Last week, Towns struggled in his first live scrimmage. He was just 3-of-9 passing for 16 yards and two interceptions and ran for just 10 yards on 14 carries. He fumbled a pair of handoffs that were recovered by the defense.

"It was kinda tough for me trying to get into that role and adjust to the new offense," Towns said.

The Hilltoppers are scheduled to scrimmage again at 2 p.m. today at L.T. Smith Stadium, but it will be without Towns as the baseball team is playing

an important Sun Belt Conference series this weekend at Middle Tennessee State. A final decision on

See MULTISPORT ATHLETE, 4B



Antone Towns is a multisport athlete on the college level, playing baseball and football for Western Kentucky. The freshman is an outfielder for the baseball team and the backup quarterback on the football team.

MULTISPORT ATHLETE, from 1B

whether the Hilltoppers still will have their scrimmage was to be made at 10 a.m. today because of recent inclement weather.

Towns is excelling on the diamond, where he plays in the outfield.

Heading into this weekend, he led WKU with a .410 batting average. He also has four homers, two triples and 15 RBIs.

"I think he's got some great talent," Murrie said. "He's got good bat speed and the more reps he gets, the better he is going to be."

If Towns had not signed on at Western to play football, Murrie said he definitely would have pursued him for the baseball team.

The freshman is hitting more than .400 without the benefit of going through fall baseball practice — he was busy with the football team.

So just how good a baseball player will he be in a couple more years if he continues to improve?

Murrie isn't saying.

"I think it's a little early to start speculating and putting pressure on him as to just how good he can

be," Murrie said. "Right now, he's just got a lot to learn and he's getting some on-the-job experience and he's producing."

Perhaps the biggest obstacle Towns has to overcome is time.

Even though baseball season and football season don't overlap, he is currently splitting time between the diamond and the gridiron because of spring football.

"It's really hard, but I went through it in high school, so it's not really that new to me," Towns said. "They just expect more out of me now. To be able to come out here and work hard at both, I have to find extra time."

While he can't commit wholly to either right now, both coaches agree that having part of Towns is better than having none at all.

"This is Antone's decision to play two sports," Murrie said. "As long as he enjoys doing it and has fun, then I'll support him 100 percent."

Harbaugh concurred. "It's nice that the two of us can come up with a plan that allows

him to do both. That's one of the nice things about college athletics. Right now, he's just happy playing, so it's good that we can share him like that."

Playing both sports at the same time does present some interesting situations.

During last week's scrimmage, Towns took a lot of snaps early on so that he could leave before the mock game was finished and head over to Nick Denes Field for a game against Florida International.

"He twisted his ankle a little bit (during the scrimmage) and I thought, 'Oh Lord, we're going to make Joel mad sending him over there with a twisted ankle,'" Harbaugh joked.

The minor injury didn't seem to bother Towns. He went 2-for-4 with a home run as the Hilltoppers won 14-5.

"I just came in there and blocked it out of my mind that I had just had a scrimmage," Towns said. "I just focused on what I was here for — to play ball."

WKU winning streak at 10 games after beating MTSU

The Western Kentucky baseball team extended its season-long winning streak to 10 games Saturday, handing Middle Tennessee a 10-4 setback at Reese Smith Field.

With the victory, the Hilltoppers (25-8, 8-2 Sun Belt) claim their third-straight series win, while the Blue Raiders (20-15, 2-6) suffer their second loss in-a-row.

WKU jumped out to an early lead in the top of the first when David Lower led-off the game with a walk, and Tanner Townsend followed with a double to left, scoring Lower to put the Toppers ahead, 1-0.

Two batters later, Townsend crossed home plate after Antone Towns ripped a single to left, and Jeff Pacholke reached first on a catcher's interference. Nick Turner stepped up and plated Towns with a groundout to third, and Trevor Keesling (Jr., Pendleton, Ind.) followed with an RBI single up the middle, scoring Pacholke to give Western a 4-0 advantage.

The Hilltoppers added another in the top of the second when Townsend recorded his second hit in as many at-bats, this time a single up the middle, and Ryan Cattell smashed a double to deep center field, plating Townsend to make it a 5-0 contest.

After a scoreless third, the Blue Raiders cut the lead to four in the

fourth when Josh Archer belted a solo home run to left off Hilltopper starter J.C. Faircloth to make it a 5-1 game.

In the top of the fifth, MTSU made it a 5-3 contest when Troy Harp hit a lead-off single, and Chad Cooper walked to put two on with no outs. Nathan Jagers stepped up and scored Harp with a groundout, 4-6-3 double play, and Cooper crossed home plate on a wild pitch from WKU reliever Andy Baldwin to cut the lead to two.

WKU answered the challenge in the top of the sixth, plating three runs highlighted by consecutive, run-scoring hits by Lower, Townsend and Cattell to increase the Topper lead to 8-3.

MTSU made it an 8-4 contest in their half of the sixth when Baldwin walked Cooper with the bases loaded, plating Archer to cut the lead to four.

The Hilltoppers added two more in the top of the seventh, thanks to Townsend's fourth hit of the day, a two-RBI single to center to make it a 10-4 contest.

Faircloth tossed 4 1/3 innings in the start, giving up three runs on four hits with three strikeouts, while Baldwin earned the win, allowing one run on three hits to win his third-straight and improve to 5-3 on the year.

MTSU used three pitchers to give up a combined 15 hits, with Adam Larson earning the loss to drop to 3-3 on the season.

WKU 5, MTSU 3

The Western Kentucky baseball team scored four runs in the final three innings Friday to defeat Middle Tennessee, 5-3, in the opener of a three-game Sun Belt series at Reese Smith Field.

After neither squad was able to plate any runs in the first two innings, Western grabbed the early lead in the top of the third when MTSU starter John Williams walked Patrick Ransdell to lead-off the inning. Three batters later, Tanner Townsend ripped a two-out single up the middle, scoring Ransdell to give the Toppers a 1-0 advantage.

The Blue Raiders answered in their half of the third off Hilltopper starter Ryan Bicondoa, plating two runs courtesy of an RBI single by Nate Jagers and a run-scoring groundout by Marshall Nisbett, making it a 2-1 contest.

MTSU added another in the bottom of the fourth when Troy Harp was hit by Bicondoa.

WKU padded its lead with one more in the ninth thanks to an RBI double by Ryan Cattell to make it a 5-3 contest. Each member of the Hilltopper starting lineup recorded a hit in the victory.

Townsend and Bicondoa earn Sun Belt Conference honors

By the Daily News APR 16 2002

Western Kentucky infielder Tanner Townsend was named Sun Belt Conference Hitter of the Week and Ryan Bicondoa garnered Pitcher of the Week honors for the second consecutive week and third time in his career Monday.

The Hilltoppers have earned the weekly award three times this season — more than any other SBC member so far this year.

Townsend batted .600 (12-for-20) for the week. His performance included two home runs, one triple and one double. He also scored eight runs, stole one base and had nine RBIs to lead the Hilltoppers to a 10-9 win over Louisville on April 9 and a 2-1 series victory at Middle Tennessee State over the weekend. He recorded four hits in two of WKU's four games this past week and collected a season-high five RBIs in Western's 10-4 win at MTSU on Saturday.

The 6-foot-1 third baseman is riding a team- and season-long 10-game hitting streak. He is second on the squad with a .383 batting average and leads the Hilltoppers with eight home runs and 39 RBIs. Townsend also leads the team in several other offensive categories, including runs (38), hits (46), total bases (78), stolen bases (10), on-base percentage (.503) and slugging percentage (.650).

Townsend's eight home runs and 39 RBIs already are career highs for a single season.

Bicondoa, meanwhile, tossed his third complete game in four starts.

He struck out 13 batters while walking only one to lead WKU to a 5-3, series-opening win at MTSU on Friday. It was his fourth complete game of the season and his fourth straight start with at least 12 strikeouts. He recorded a strikeout in every inning but the ninth, including three in the sixth and two each in the second, fourth and seventh.

The 6-foot-1 right-hander is 4-0 in SBC starts and 5-2 overall, and leads the conference with 92 strikeouts.

He also sports a 3.12 ERA and leads the Hilltoppers in innings pitched (75), games started (10) and complete games (4).

Last year, Bicondoa recorded 96 strikeouts — the fourth most in a single season in Hilltopper history. His 92 this year bring his career

total to 188, moving him into fourth place on the Hilltopper career strikeout list.

Football team works out

After missing two days of the spring season over the weekend, the Western Kentucky football team worked out in helmets for more than two hours Monday.

It was the first of four scheduled practices this week in preparation for the annual Red-White game.

The Hilltoppers will practice under the lights at L.T. Smith Stadium today and Thursday, and will return for a light workout without pads Friday afternoon.

"We had to adjust our schedule, so we used one of our noncontact days to get back in the flow of things," WKU coach Jack Harbaugh said. "When you miss two or three days, the players' attention isn't that good. The field was still slippery after last week's rain, which caused some problems, but our guys battled through it."

Without pads, Western focused mostly on passing drills and special teams play. WKU attacked every phase of special teams.

"You just can't do much on the inside running game without pads," Harbaugh said.

The Red-White game, scheduled for Saturday, will mark the end of spring practice for the Hilltoppers, provided this week's full slate satisfies Harbaugh and his staff.

"We're going to have some hard-nosed practices (today) and Thursday, then back off on Friday," he said. "If the last five practices are good, spirited workouts, we will end the spring with 14 days of work. But if not, we'll get back out on the field one time next week to work on some drills."

Athletes set personal bests

Western Kentucky athletes set several personal bests Sunday at the Florida State Triangular.

For the men, Jonathon Brown ran a new personal best on his way to a collegiate first place in the 100 meters in 10.47 seconds. Brown also was the top collegiate finisher in the 200 in 21.04.

The highlight of the day was Eigo Siumu's school record-breaking toss of 197-10 in the javelin, where he was the top collegiate finisher and second overall. Siumu also tied his previous best in the high jump at 6-9.

Enda Grandfield was second in the 3,000 in 8:33.13 seconds and third in the 1,500 in 3:57.60. Allen

County-Scottsville High School product Chris Young was third in the 2,000 steeplechase in 6:12.29. Justin Miller was fifth in the 400 in a personal-best time of 47.60. Matt McClure set new personal bests in the 110 hurdles (15.11) and 400 hurdles (54.33). Raigo Toompuu set a new season best of 156-8 in the discus, good enough for second place. Toompuu also took second in the shot put with a toss of 52-11.

On the women's side, Misty Hair had a career day. Hair had personal bests in the shot put (38-11.50), discus (127-0) and the hammer (130-5).

Aimee Wellerding was third in the 400 in a personal best 57.76. Coach Michelle Murphy Scott finished second, just ahead of freshman Jill Shannon in the 1,500. Christy Green tied her previous season best in the pole vault with a jump of 9-0.25. Hanna Lee threw for a season personal best in the javelin with a fourth-place toss of 100-3, just behind teammate Holly Wilder, who was third with a throw of 101-8.

Lady Tops finish ninth

Western Kentucky golfer Crystal Anglea tied a season-low with a 77 Saturday on the final day of the Lady Colonel Classic to finish in a tie for 16th place.

The Lady Toppers shot a 327 in the third round en route to a ninth-place finish, shooting a 972 over the three days at the event hosted by Eastern Kentucky at Arlington Golf Club in Richmond. Toledo recorded a 314 to compile a 942 team score, winning the tournament by four shots over Murray State.

Samantha Fox of Austin Peay shot her second 72 in three days to win medalist honors with a total score of 6-over-par 222.

Anglea posted a three-day score of 238 to lead WKU for the first time since she tied for 12th at the Lady Racer Classic in October. It's her fifth top-20 finish in the eight events she's entered this year.

Bowling Green High School product Jennifer McGill shot her second 81 of the tournament for a total of 241, tying for 23rd place. Jennifer Taylor carded a 246 to tie for 35th, while Sarah Lilly finished tied for 38th. Leslie Adams tied for 62nd with a three-day score of 256.

WKU returns to action at the April 22-24 Sun Belt Conference Championships in Niceville, Fla.

Hilltoppers lose to Blue Raiders

The Western Kentucky baseball team had a season-long 10-game winning streak snapped Sunday as Middle Tennessee avoided the sweep with a 6-4 victory at Reese Smith Field.

The Hilltoppers (25-9, 8-3 Sun Belt Conference) earned their third-straight conference series win in Saturday's 10-4 triumph.

Middle Tennessee grabbed the early lead in the bottom of the first, scoring three runs on three hits.

After a scoreless second and third, Western cut the lead to two when senior catcher Ryan Cattell took the first pitch from Blue Raider starter Steven Kines and sent it over the wall in left-center field for his fifth homer of the season.

In the bottom of the fifth, the Blue Raiders increased their lead to 5-1 when Akers doubled to center and Sims belted a two-out, line-drive home run over the wall in right.

With neither team able to plate any runs in the sixth, WKU answered in the top of the seventh when Jeff Pacholke 'smashed his first homer of the season over the left-field fence to cut the lead to 5-2. Matt Wilhite followed with a double to right, and Patrick Ransdell roped a double down the right field line, scoring Wilhite to make it a 5-3 MTSU advantage.

Tanner Townsend cut the lead to one with a single to right, extending a season and team-high hitting streak to 10 games, scoring Ransdell to make it a 5-4 game.

The Hilltoppers return to action Tuesday when they travel to Austin Peay for a 6:30 p.m. contest.

Govs tag WKU with another loss

By the Daily News APR 17 2002

Chris Hyde scored Travis Beech with a bases-loaded single in the bottom of the 10th inning to give Austin Peay an 8-7 victory over Western Kentucky on Tuesday at Raymond C. Hand Park in Clarksville, Tenn.

The Hilltoppers (25-10) suffered their second consecutive loss after winning a season-high 10 straight. The Governors improve to 18-18.

The Hilltoppers trailed 4-0 before getting on the board in the top of the fourth when Jeff Pacholke hit a lead-off single to center. Trevor Keesling followed with a double down the right field line to put two on with no outs. Kevin Bearden scored Pacholke with a ground-out to first, and Keesling crossed home plate on a sacrifice fly to right by Ryan Arnett to cut the lead to two, 4-2.

The Governors answered in their half of the fourth, scoring two runs on four hits, highlighted by a pair of RBI singles by A.J. Ellis and Hyde.

After APSU added another in the bottom of the fifth, WKU responded in the top of the sixth, plating three runs courtesy of a homer to straightaway center by Ryan Cattell - his sixth of the season - and back-to-back RBI singles by Patrick Ransdell and Travis Brown to make it a 7-5 contest.

After the Governors were unable to increase the lead in the bottom of the sixth, Cattell tied the score in the top of the seventh when he launched his second long ball of the game, a two-run shot to center field.

With neither squad able to plate any runs in the eighth and ninth, the Governors earned the win in the bottom of the 10th with a hit by Hyde.

WKU starter Grady Hinchman pitched three innings, gave up four runs on six hits with fanned three. Matt Wilhite, who was tagged with his first loss of the season, allowed one run on five hits to drop to 6-1.

The Hilltoppers return to action at 5 p.m. CDT Wednesday at Kentucky.

APR 15 2002

Daily News

Briefly

From staff and
wire reports.

Western baseball beats Kentucky

Senior starter Ryan Bicondoa struck out 13 batters, while Ryan Cattell hit his third home run in the last two days, part of a 3-for-4 performance, as the Western Kentucky baseball team overpowered Kentucky 5-1 Wednesday at Cliff Hagan Stadium.

The Hilltoppers (26-10) snapped a two-game losing skid with the win, while the Wildcats (14-22) dropped their fifth straight.

Bicondoa (6-2) dominated UK for seven innings, allowing just one run on three hits as he fanned nine of the first 12 batters he faced.

It was his fifth consecutive start with at least 12 strikeouts, and he became one of only four Western pitchers ever to reach the century mark in a season. He now has 105 strikeouts - the second-best single-season total in Hilltopper history. He also stands fourth on the WKU career strikeout list with 201.

The Hilltoppers grabbed the early lead in the top of the third when Tanner Townsend drew a lead-off walk from Wildcat starter Craig Snipp, and Nick Turner doubled down the left field line, plating Townsend to give WKU a 1-0 lead.

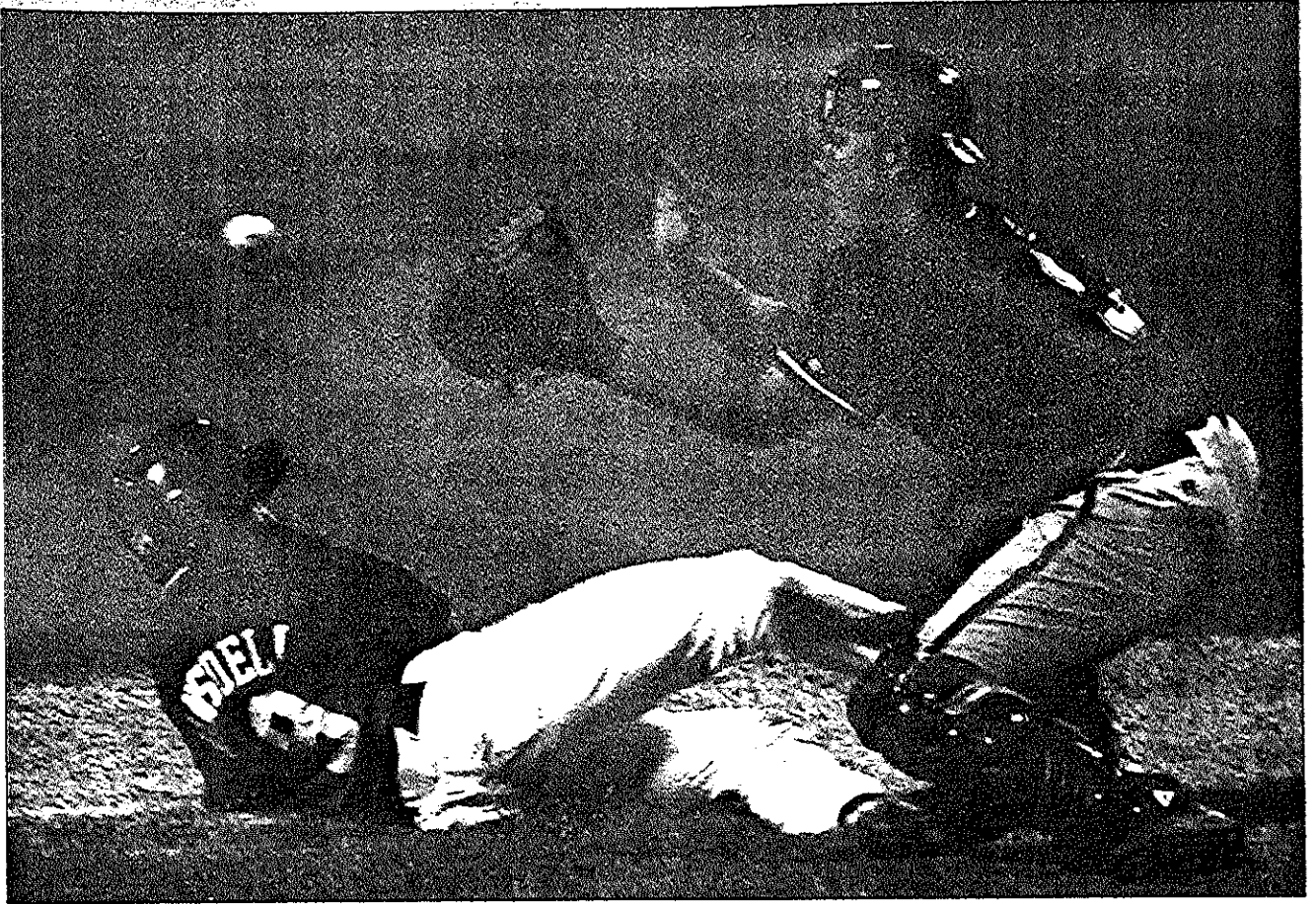
In the top of the fourth, Western opened up a 5-0 advantage, plating four runs highlighted by an RBI double by Townsend and Cattell's solo shot, his third in the last two games. Trevor Keesling and David Lower also recorded base hits for the Toppers and Travis Brown drove in a run in the inning.

The Wildcats finally got on the board in the bottom of the sixth, scoring one run courtesy of an RBI single by Brent Stephens through the right side of the Topper defense to cut the lead to four, 5-1.

After a scoreless seventh and eighth, UK threatened in the bottom of the ninth, loading the bases with three consecutive walks, but Adam Prida ended the charge, fanning the next two batters to earn his first career save and preserve the 5-1 victory.

The Wildcats used five pitchers to give up a combined 11 hits, with Snipp earning the loss to drop to 3-3 on the year.

The Hilltoppers return home to host Brescia Thursday, with first pitch set for 6 p.m.



Western Kentucky's Patrick Ransdell (left) slides safely into home under Brescia catcher Brad Keown on Thursday at Nick Denes Field. The Hilltoppers came from behind to beat the Bearcats 8-4. Joe Imel/Daily News

Western comes back for win

Tops score three in the sixth to beat NAIA's Brescia 8-4

By OJ STAPLETON APR 19 2008
The Daily News
ojstapleton@bgdailynews.com/783-3239

The Western Kentucky baseball team got a scare Thursday from Brescia, an NAIA school in Owensboro, but pulled out an 8-3 win at Nick Denes Field.

The Hilltoppers trailed 4-3 heading into the bottom of the sixth, but first baseman Jeff Pacholke slammed a two-run homer to right field. Centerfielder Rafael Vallejo also added an RBI single in the inning to give Western a 6-4 lead.

Kenneth Yaeger, who played at Bowling Green High School, added a two-run, pinch-hit single in the seventh to account for the Toppers final runs.

WKU coach Joel Murrie said he was not surprised that Brescia (20-23) gave his team a good game.

"Brescia has a very good ballclub. Most people will say 'Yeah, that's a crock,' but this team has some good talent," Murrie said. "NAIA schools have different recruiting regulations and scholarship regulations, and NAIA teams are really scary enough to come in and beat just about anyone at the NCAA Division I level."



Western Kentucky's Rafael Vallejo avoids a tag from Brescia's Jake Shoulders on Thursday. Joe Imel/Daily News

Freshman pitcher J.C. Faircloth got the win in relief. He came on with the bases loaded and no out in the first inning after starter Brooks Sketo loaded the bases by hitting the first batter he faced then walking the next two.

"Faircloth knew he was going to have to pitch, but we didn't think we were going to have to go to him until the third," Murrie said. "He did a real good job getting himself ready to come in though. I'm very pleased with him."

Faircloth went seven innings, allowing six hits and two runs while striking out four.

With just 10 remaining home games (three Sun Belt Conference series and a rivalry game against Kentucky), Murrie took the opportunity to make sure all his seniors got a chance to start.

Tanner Townsend normally plays third but moved to short and Nick Turner, who usually plays first or designated hitter, played at third. Everyday catcher Ryan Cattel was the DH and reserve backstop Brian Polson got the start.

"We gave all of our players that were position players a start," Murrie said. "No one really played out of position for us, so it was just an opportunity to have them play in the field one time together."

The Toppers (27-10) have the weekend off before returning to action Tuesday at Lipscomb.

Western host New Orleans next weekend in a SBC series.

Brescia 200 200 000 - 4 7 3
Western Kentucky 003 003 20x - 8 8 1
WP - Faircloth (5-1). LP - Freel (2-3). HR - Pacholke (2).

APR 22 2002 Hilltopper baseball, softball teams enjoying successful seasons

As the 2001-02 school year at Western Kentucky nears an end, many Hilltoppers fans probably think there isn't much left to cheer about on the Hill.



Michael Compton
Sports writer

After all, basketball season is a distant memory. The men's recruiting class has been filled out and the women have the coach of the future in Mary Taylor Cowles. Football fans are just coming down from their ball team and the still-in-spring fix with this past weekend's red-white game and the selections of Joseph Jefferson and Mel Mitchell in the NFL

Nothing but net

draft. So outside of Diddle Arena's renovation, it seems nothing much is happening on the Hill. Well, not so fast, Western Kentucky fans. Allow me to direct your attention to the two teams that play just down from L.T. Smith Stadium, who are in the middle of perhaps two of the most surprising seasons for any team at Western

starters in the field and its top four pitchers from last year's club — as was the case with Joel Murrie's young baseball squad — fans can expect a rebuilding year, right? Don't tell that to the 2002 Hilltoppers, who sat idle this weekend basking in the glow of a 27-10 record. And that record hides one of 8-3 in the Sun Belt Conference, good enough for second place in the conference behind nationally ranked South Alabama. Not a bad start for a team picked to finish eighth out of nine teams in the preseason conference poll.

Led by senior third baseman Tanner Townsend (.371, 8 HR, 41 RBIs), Western has had remarkable success at Nick Dences Field, winning 21 out of 24 games. Townsend is getting help from freshman Antone Towns, who I hear might make a good quarter-back as well. Towns has taken to right field like a baby to a rattle, scorching opposing pitchers with a .366 average and four home runs in only 29 games. The pitching is nearly as impressive. Senior starter Ryan Bicondoa, the cousin of major league pitcher Daryl Kile, is making a case for a major league career as well. Bicondoa anchors the starting staff with a 6-2 record and 105 strikeouts in 82 innings pitched.

Murrie said the recent success is reminiscent of the 1985 team, which was one of his most successful. That team, led by sluggers John Clem and Rob Tombertien, won 43 games and fell just short of a NCAA tournament bid, falling 11-10 to Old Dominion in the Sun Belt Conference finals. It's been 22 years since Western last tasted NCAA tournament action, but this squad is poised to make a serious run at a postseason berth.

But they aren't the only spring team making some noise in the Sun Belt. Just down the street from the Nick, Leslie Phelan's softball team has the looks of a team on the rise as well. After a successful 32-25-1 debut season, the Hilltoppers suffered a sophomore jinx last season, finishing 23-37. But it appears as if Phelan's squad has turned the corner this year. Despite a split with Sun Belt rival Middle Tennessee over the weekend, Western still stands at 30-17 (3-5 SBC). Much like their baseball brethren, the team has enjoyed success at home as well, tallying 14 wins and losing only five. Pitching is the key in softball and the Hilltoppers have a pair of strong arms in Allison Silver and Rocky Castillo. The team has confidence, too.

See COMPTON, 5B

COMPTON, from 3B

Left fielder Sara Alanis said her team is, at worst, the second best team in the conference, although Florida International might have something to say about that during the first weekend in May.

This year's Western team has assembled a nice little resume heading down the home stretch. Earlier this month Western defeated No. 17 Louisiana-Lafayette in Lafayette, ending the Ragin Cajuns 23-game home

winning streak.

During non-conference play Western has had success as well, especially in tournament play. The Hilltoppers have claimed three tournament championships this season and even have some in-state bragging rights with a 6-5 victory over Kentucky in February.

Although the 2002 softball team may not be ready to step up to that next level, the ground-work is there. And knowing

Phelan, they will be ready when the conference tournament begins in Miami next month.

And while both coaches would quickly point out that there's still a lot of time left in the season, it's never too early to jump on the bandwagon. After all, no one expected them to be this good already, did they?

— *Michael Compton is a sports writer for the Daily News.*

Pitcher nearing record

Bicondoa needs seven Ks to surpass WKU season record of 111; Tops open three-game series with New Orleans today

By MICHEAL COMPTON

The Daily News

APR 26 2012

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Western Kentucky pitcher Ryan Bicondoa doesn't consider himself superstitious, but he has taken to an item found on a recent road trip.

"There is a penny I found at Arkansas State laying on the ground," Bicondoa said. "I put it in my back right pocket before every game I pitch."



RYAN BICONDOA
WKU pitcher

With the way the senior right-hander has been throwing this season, Bicondoa may have plenty of pennies in the near future.

Western Kentucky opens a three-game series with Sun Belt Conference rival New Orleans at 6 p.m. today at Nick Denes Field. And like the previous four SBC series, Bicondoa will take the mound for Game 1. But tonight could be special for the Las Vegas native. If he gets seven strikeouts, Bicondoa will surpass the season record of 111, set in 1991 by Heath Haynes.

Bicondoa (6-2) has developed a reputation as a strikeout pitcher, with five consecutive games of recording at least 12. Unlike fireballers such as Roger Clemens and Randy Johnson, Bicondoa doesn't rely on fastballs to blow opposing hitters away.

"I don't think it matters how hard you throw, you are going to get hit," Bicondoa said. "You have to go hit your

See PITCHER, 4C

PITCHER, from 1C

spots. All my pitches — fastball, curveball, changeup — I feel like I can throw them at any time on any count. Right now, my changeup feels like it can't be hit."

WKU coach Joel Murrie said Bicondoa is a player who understands the art of pitching.

"He is not a thrower; he is a pitcher," Murrie said. "He doesn't go out with the mindset of throwing everything by the hitter. He keeps the batters off balance by throwing strikes, quality pitches and changing speeds."

Although the strikeout record seems to be a foregone conclusion, Bicondoa said he is less concerned with individual stats and more concerned with the team's performance.

"I want to win," Bicondoa said.

"I want to go to Omaha (Neb.), no matter what. That is the ultimate goal. I'm not a vocal leader. I lead by example. Hopefully, getting the win (tonight) can set the tone and build a fire under the other pitches, making them want to win more."

Western (28-10) enters tonight's action 8-3 midway through its SBC schedule. It's surprising for a team picked to finish eighth out of nine squads.

Murrie said Bicondoa's performance on the mound has been a strong reason for the early success.

"We are 4-0 in Sun Belt openers this season," Murrie said. "Your objective is to win at least two out of three games. Ryan gets us halfway there. It's a shot in the arm to have Bic do what he does and pitch for us on Friday nights."

The intensity Bicondoa brings to the mound has carried over to the rest of the staff. The Hilltoppers are third in the conference in pitching with a 3.96 staff ERA.

Bicondoa attributes part of the success to new pitching coach Mike McLaury, who spent two seasons at Middle Tennessee State and helped develop starter Dewon Brazleton into a first-round draft pick by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in last year's amateur draft.

"It's a lot different than last year," Bicondoa said. "He's brought a lot of good things. (Former) coach (Clyde) Keller was a really great coach, but I think they found a good replacement. Of course he knows his stuff. He coached Brazleton. When he says something, you do it. He's brought

a lot of ideas that have helped with our arms. People's arms aren't hurting as bad as they did last year. He's a really good coach."

But it helps to have a pitcher capable of making the pitches, and Murrie said Bicondoa is that type of pitcher. Murrie sees a lot of intangibles of other former Hilltoppers — Chris Turner, Heath Haynes and Ryan Hutchison — when he looks at his staff ace. All three have enjoyed success at the professional level.

Turner was a backup catcher for the 2000 world champion New York Yankees, while Haynes played for the Montreal Expos in 1994. Hutchison is pitching in the Philadelphia Phillies' organization with the Clearwater Phillies.

"He has Chris Turner's maturity, makeup and approach to game," Murrie said. "He has the competitiveness of Ryan Hutchison and the ability to locate and throw strikes like Heath Haynes, who did things that would just amaze anyone that knows anything about pitching. Bic is in that zone."

Bicondoa also has the bloodlines. St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Darryl Kile is his cousin, but Bicondoa said that family tie really isn't as impressive as it might seem.

"It's not like I know Darryl Kile," Bicondoa said. "I met him once, just like a 'hi' kind of thing. If you said my name to him, he would have no idea who you were talking about."

But Kile might know soon enough if Bicondoa continues to make a name for himself on the mound.

Western goes up 2-0 on UNO

Hilltoppers rally for win

By MICHAEL COMPTON

The Daily News

www.dailynews.com/783-3947

Nick Denes, field may not look like Whitley Field, but for the Western Kentucky baseball team, it's developing a reputation as the friendly confines.

Tanner Townsend scored a run and had two RBIs as the Hilltoppers rallied with two runs in the bottom of the eighth and prevailed 3-2.

The win extended the Hilltopper home winning streak to a season high 11 games.

"We have a lot of confidence here," Townsend said. "We see the ball well at the plate and play good defense. We love it here."

While the final outcome

avored the home team, it was a nip-and-tuck game that wasn't decided until Western's final at bat.

New Orleans struck first. The Privateers took the lead 1-0 in the top of the third on an RBI single by center fielder Donnie Bollich that died in the infield grass before Western shortstop Travis Brown could get to it.

Western quickly answered in the bottom of the inning with a two-out RBI single by third baseman Tanner Townsend, tying the score 1-1.

The Privateers had a huge opportunity to regain the lead in the top of the sixth inning, loading the bases with no one out. Reliever Adam Baldwin pitched out of the jam with help from his

defense. Pinch hitter Paul Koslowski lined a rope to Townsend, who alertly threw to first baseman Nick Turner to complete the double play. Short stop Chandler Rose ended the inning with a harmless tap back to Baldwin.

"I got lucky because the runner on first fell asleep," Townsend said. "It looked like I made a good play, but it was really the base runner's fault."

New Orleans bounced back and cashed in the next inning. Bollich drew a lead off walk and scored on an RBI single by designated hitter J.D. Hether, making the score 2-1 New Orleans.

But again the Hilltoppers battled back and again Townsend was at the center of the rally.

After two were out in the eighth, center fielder Ryan Arnett walked. Townsend followed with a screaming liner over the head of Bollich for an RBI triple.

Catcher Ryan Catell followed with an RBI double giving the Hilltoppers their first lead of the game 3-2.

"Ryan Arnett's at bat was a big at bat because that got us to the two guys that have been carrying us for the majority of the season," head coach Murrie said.

Catell's hit proved to be the difference in the game as closer Matt Wilhite shut New Orleans down and recorded his fifth save. Despite walking the lead-off hitter, the Franklin-Simpson

See WESTERN, 3B

Friday's game WKU 4, UNO 1

Ryan Bicondoa struck out 14 Privateers and Brown had a triple and an RBI as the Hilltoppers took game one of the weekend series Friday night.

Bicondoa's 14 strikeouts equaled a career high and allowed the senior right hander to break the single season strikeout record of 111 previously held by Heath Haynes.

Bicondoa (7-2) now has 119 strikeouts on the season, with three weeks remaining in the season.

"There is not a coach in the Sun Belt that doesn't go in to win at least two out of three," Bicondoa said. "I never take for granted that we are going to go out there and beat anybody by just penciling a line-up in, but Bic is doing an outstanding of getting us to game two halfway to winning the series."

New Orleans 000 000 001-161
Western Kentucky 000 000 01x-453
WP - Bicondoa (7-2) LP - Kling (4-3) S - Wilhite (4)

WESTERN, from 1B

graduate settled down to retire the next three Privateer hitters.

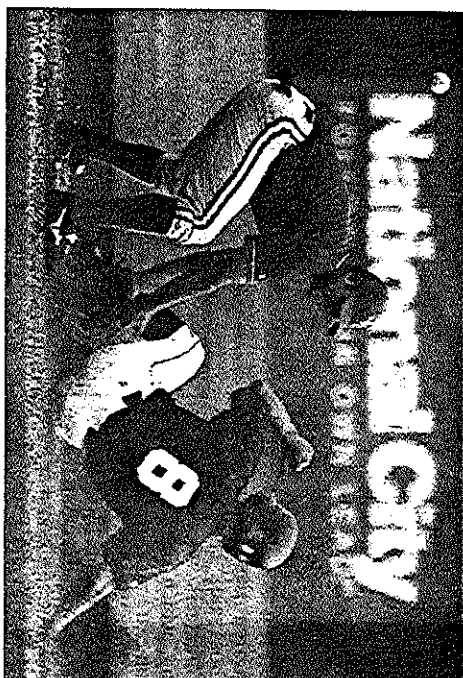
Baldwin pitched three innings and improved his record to (6-3). Mark Stander (3-3) took the loss, despite striking out eight Hilltoppers.

"I give our players credit, especially our pitching staff," Murrie said. "When you look at J.C. Faircloth, his name won't be mentioned too prominently in this game, but he got us to the fifth inning. Andy Baldwin did a great job to hold us in the game at that point."

"It was great team effort. Pitching and defense is what has gotten us this far and it held us in the game."

The series concludes at 1 p.m. today with Western (30-10, 10-3 Sun Belt Conference) looking to sweep the Privateers (22-21, 8-9 SBC).

New Orleans 001 000 100-271
Western Kentucky 001 000 02x-360
WP - Baldwin 6-3 LP - Stander (3-3) S - Wilhite (5)



Clinton Lewis/Daily News
Western Kentucky's Travis Brown (right) slides into second base while New Orleans shortstop Mark Monaghan mishandles the ball Saturday during their Sun Belt Conference game at Nick Denes Field.

Tops' weekend a clean sweep

Western improves its Sun Belt record to 11-3 with victory over UNO

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News

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Jerry Cecil isn't exactly a slugger for the Western Kentucky baseball team.

In fact, he came into Sunday's Sun Belt Conference game with New Orleans batting just .196 with four RBIs.

That didn't stop him from delivering the game-winning hit as the Hilltoppers completed a three-game sweep of the Privateers with a 13-12 come-from-behind victory.

Western (31-10, 11-3 SBC) was trailing 12-10 when Cecil came up to bat with one out and the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth.

WKU coach Joel Murrie could have opted to pinch hit freshman Antoine Towns, the team's third leading hitter, but instead opted to stick with the senior, who had tripled in his only other at-bat.

After taking a first-pitch strike, Murrie called timeout to speak to Cecil.

"Ironically, when I called timeout



Clinton Lewis/Daily News
Western Kentucky shortstop Nick Brown reaches for a throw as a New Orleans baserunner slides into second Sunday at Nick Denes Field.

and went up to talk with him, I told him, 'Jerry, you're gonna win this ballgame, so just relax for a second and enjoy this moment,'" Murrie said. "Two pitches later he did it."

Cecil said he felt confident when he stepped up to the plate.

"But then when I got down 1-2 in the count I was like 'Oh, no.' Then I was looking for him to throw a curveball and he threw a curveball," Cecil said.

Cecil snacked the curveball into

the gap as all three baserunners came around to score and end the game.

It took a monumental comeback just to get Cecil up to the plate with the chance to win it.

Hilltopper starting pitcher Brandon Miller gave up seven runs in the first two innings before being replaced by Kenny Hughes.

New Orleans (22-22, 8-10) added another run in the top of the sixth to go up 8-0.

"Today was a very uncharacteris-

tic game for us," Murrie said. "We didn't get the starting pitching we have over the last several weeks of Sun Belt play. We also weren't very characteristic defensively. It's really hard to feel bad about what we did wrong, because we really played with a lot of heart today."

Western finally got on the board in the bottom of the sixth on a solo homer by catcher Ryan Cattell.

Adam Prida pitched a scoreless seventh for Western and the Toppers exploded for six runs in the bottom half of the inning.

Pinch hitter Brian Polson led off with a single, Patrick Ramsdell singled and Travis Brown walked to load the bases.

Kenneth Yager struck out for the second out of the inning, and the Privateers nearly got out of the inning when David Lower hit a chopper back to starting pitcher Tom Lipari. Lipari then fired the ball past first basemen Gabe Trevino, allowing two runs to score. Tanner Townsend followed by dumping a two-run single into left field.

Lipari was lifted for Brandon Mignues, who walked Cattell and gave up an RBI single to Matt

See TOPS, 6B

MAY 01 2002

Hilltoppers fall 11-3 to Cardinals in baseball tilt

By The Daily News

The Western Kentucky baseball team stranded a season-high 13 runners on base, and Louisville had a five-run third inning en route to an 11-3 win Tuesday at Cardinal Stadium.

The Hilltoppers fell to 31-11 on the season; the Cardinals improve to 28-12.

Western grabbed the early lead in the top of the second when Nick Turner drew a leadoff walk and advanced to third after a stolen base and a wild pitch by Cardinal starter Cliff Novak. Jeff Pacholke then hit a sacrifice fly to left, plating Turner to make it a 1-0 game.

In the bottom of the second, however, the Cardinals answered when Ken Tirpack scored Curt Stewart with a double to left, and Carl Williams Jr. plated two runs with a double down the left-field line to put Louisville ahead 3-1.

In their next at-bat, the Hilltoppers cut the lead to one when Pacholke collected his second RBI of the day, scoring Ryan Cattell with a single to left-center to make it 3-2.

Louisville responded in the bottom of the third, plating five runs on five hits highlighted by a solo home run by Mark Jurich to lead

off the inning, and a three-run shot by Tirpack to increase the Cardinal lead to six, 8-2.

After three scoreless innings, WKU cut the lead to five when Tanner Townsend ripped a leadoff single up the middle. Three batters later, Patrick Raustadt collected his season-high third hit of the game, an RBI single that scored Townsend to make it 8-3.

That would be all for WKU.

WKU pitcher Grady Hinchman made his fourth start of the season, allowing two runs on one hit with two strikeouts to fall to 0-1 on the season. Brandon Miller struck out four batters in 4.2 innings of relief.

WKU returns to action Friday at 6:30 p.m. CDT at Louisiana-Lafayette in the first game of a vital Sun Belt Conference series. Just a half game separates the Hilltoppers (11-3 in the SBC) and Ragin' Cajuns (12-3 in the SBC) in the league standings.

Softball

Western Kentucky's softball doubleheader with Tennessee Tech today has been canceled.

The Hilltoppers will conclude the regular season with a pair of Sun Belt Conference doubleheaders over the weekend, with first pitch set for 1 p.m. Saturday and

Sunday at WKU's Softball Field. Western (35-18, 6-6 in the SBC) host Florida International (35-30, 6-6 in the SBC) in a battle for the second seed at the league tournament, which will be in Miami from May 9-11.

Three WKU seniors will be honored prior to their final home games Sunday - Melissa Gomes, Angie Head and Amy Tudor.

Scholarship dinner

The fourth annual Jimmy Feix Scholarship Dinner will be May

10 at Wolf's Convention Center in Henderson.

Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased through May 9 at Matt's News and Gifts at 106 North Elm Street in Henderson.

There will be a social hour from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., with the dinner beginning at 7 p.m.

This year's featured speaker is Romeo Crennel, defensive coordinator of the world champion New England Patriots.

Lafayette evens series with WKU

By the Daily News MAY 05 2002

Behind a solid performance from starting pitcher Andy Gros, Louisiana-Lafayette claimed a 5-1 victory over Western Kentucky on Saturday, in the second game of a three-game Sun Belt Conference series at M.L. "Tigue" Moore Field.

The win moves the Ragin' Cajuns (31-16, 13-4 Sun Belt) back in front of the Hilltoppers (32-12, 12-4 Sun Belt) by a half game.

For the second-straight contest, pitching dominated the game early on, as Hilltopper starter J.C. Faircloth and Gros allowed just three hits combined through the first three innings.

In the top of the fourth, UL Lafayette opened up the scoring, plating two runs on three hits highlighted by a sacrifice fly by Corey Coles followed by an RBI double by Brad Saloom to give the Ragin' Cajuns the early 2-0 lead.

After a scoreless fourth and fifth, Lafayette added two more in the bottom of the sixth, tak-

ing advantage of two Hilltopper errors, and another in the bottom of the seventh on an RBI double by Bryan Sneed to give the Ragin' Cajuns a 5-0 lead heading into the final three innings of play.

In the top of the eighth, junior David Lower got the Hilltoppers on the board, belting a solo shot over the wall in left, his second of the season to make it a 5-1 contest.

The Ragin' Cajuns looked to add to their lead in the bottom of the eighth, loading the bases with no outs. Dallas Morris stepped up and hit a hard liner right into the glove of Patrick Ransdell. Ransdell stepped on second base and fired a throw to Hilltopper Nick Turner to complete the rare triple play to get out of the inning.

In the top of the ninth, WKU put the leadoff runner on base when Brian Polson was hit by Gros.

Kevin Ardoin relieved Gros and struck out the next three Topper batters to end the game.

Gros allowed one run on six hits while striking out six in 8.0

innings to earn the win and improve to 8-3 on the year.

Faircloth went 5.1 innings, allowing four runs on five hits to earn the loss, dropping his season record to 5-2. Adam Prida recorded the final two outs in the sixth, while Grady Hinchman allowed just one run on four hits in a relief effort in the eighth and ninth.

Sunday's rubber match will begin at 1 p.m. at M.L. "Tigue" Moore Field.

Friday's game

Ryan Bicondoa (8-2) earned his sixth-straight Sun Belt victory, and seventh overall, while Ransdell tied a season-high with three hits for the second consecutive contest as WKU beat Lafayette 5-4 in game one of the weekend series.

WKU has yet to lose a game one in conference series play this season.

Junior Matt Wilhite earned his sixth save of the year in the win.

Bicondoa went 8.0, allowing four runs on seven hits while striking out six to improve to 6-0 in SBC starts.

MAY 0 8 2002

Hilltoppers playing with nothing to lose

Western softball team set for Sun Belt tourney

By MICHAEL COMPTON

The Daily News

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When the Sun Belt Conference preseason softball poll was released, nothing was expected from the Western Kentucky softball team. Picked to finish last out of five teams, the Lady Toppers approached the season with nothing to lose.

Now three months, 37 wins and a second-place finish in the regular season later, Western still has the same approach entering the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. Western (37-20, 8-8 Sun Belt Conference) opens play Thursday at 12:30 p.m. against host Florida International (38-32, 8-8 SBC). Head coach Leslie Phelan said

she has challenged her team, but is happy with their progression through the regular season.

"My hesitation throughout the season to get overly excited about the season we were having was because we had something to prove in the conference regular season," Phelan said. "We had a good record and several non-conference wins against some good teams. The goal has always been to compete for the Sun Belt Championship. I am extremely happy to be going in as the number two seed."

And while Louisiana-Lafayette won the conference regular season by seven games, The Lady Toppers enter the tournament as the only conference team to defeat the Ragin' Cajuns this season. Western upended Lafayette 7-6 in game two of a double header on April 6, ending

the Ragin' Cajuns' 23 game home winning streak. It's a fact that is on the mind of pitcher and designated player Kristalyn Smith.

"I think it's an advantage for us that they know we've beaten them," Smith said. "We just have to bring our A game against any team and play with the same level of confidence we had against Lafayette."

But before Western can think about Lafayette, they must first face a familiar foe in Florida International. The teams split a four-game series at the WKU Softball Complex last weekend, but Phelan said the team didn't play its best ball.

"Being optimistic, we won two games and we didn't come close to playing well in probably three of the four games," Phelan said. "I was pleased with the last

game, because I thought we had all parts of the game going. But we sure gave them a lot of runs over the weekends. There is no telling what the results would have been in our two losses had we played a little more solid defense and had some key pitching in some situations.

"Our goal all year is to peak at the end and we did that in game four."

Still, Western has history on its side. In its first two seasons, the Lady Toppers have ended the FIU season with wins in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. Western defeated the Golden Panthers 5-3 in eight innings last season and won a 12-inning marathon 2-1 to advance to the Sun Belt Conference Championship game in 2000.

See HILLTOPPERS, 7C

HILLTOPPERS, from 1C

Pitcher Rocky Castillo, who defeated FIU twice last weekend, said it's a nice mental advantage to have.

"I feel FIU is going to have doubts in their mind," she said. "They are going to be doubting themselves and that is going to be a mental edge for us."

While Castillo had success last weekend, number one starter Allison Silver did not. The left hander dropped two games to FIU, but Phelan said she is still leaning towards giving Silver the start Thursday.

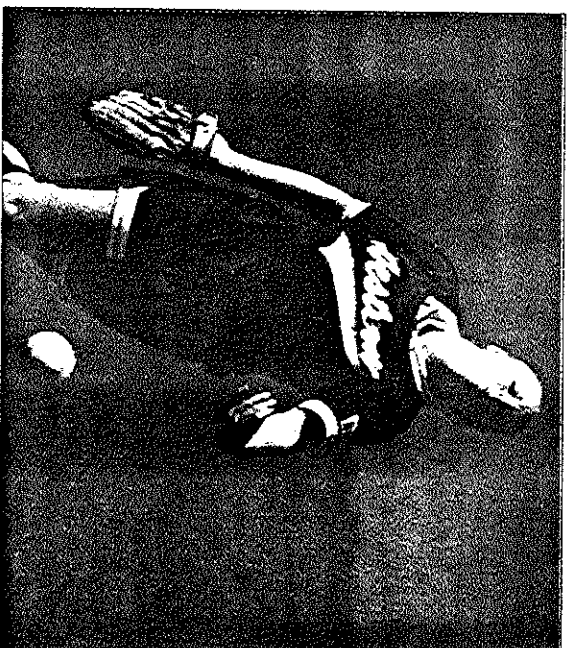
"I'm still undecided," Phelan said. "I expect there to be some lobbying from my assistant coaches regarding that. But in the past when we've done that, it's pretty consistently backfired."

"I think I'm leaning more towards giving Allie the start, but instead of having Kristalyn ready

to come in relief, having Rocky ready to go right away. It's still a day away though, so I have some time."

And while this weekend looks to be the end of the Lady Toppers season, the Sun Belt Conference doesn't receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament because the conference does not have six teams. Castillo said this is an opportunity to give the seniors one more championship before they graduate.

"Of course you know you're going to be back, but when you can share an experience like winning you want to do that," Castillo said. "I think this year we have had great leadership with our seniors and I'd really like to pull it off with them. All we talk about is how nice it would be. The way we've been playing, I think we can pull it off."



Joe Innel/Daily News
Western sophomore pitcher Allison Silver delivers the ball during a Hilltopper victory over Austin Peay on April 26.

WKU opens important Sun Belt series

By MICHAEL COMPTON
The Daily News

For less than 24 hours last weekend, the Western Kentucky baseball team sat alone in first place in the Sun Belt Conference. While it would be easy to think that a team picked to finish eighth in the nine-team conference would be satisfied with that accomplishment, the Hilltoppers want more.

"It's been a goal of ours every since the beginning of the season to win the conference," senior catcher Ryan Cattell said. "We got picked second to last at the beginning of the year and that really motivated us to come out and show we are a much better ballclub than what people think."

Western will continue its push for its first conference championship since 1988 on Saturday as they open a three-game series against New Mexico State, with a doubleheader beginning at 2 p.m.

WKU (32-13, 12-5 Sun Belt conference) sits a game and a half behind division leaders

Louisiana-Lafayette and South Alabama, who face each other in Lafayette this weekend.

Add to the mix the fact that South Alabama visits Nick Denes Field next weekend and Western is confident that they have its destiny in hand.

"We have to go for the sweep this weekend and not worry about South Alabama and Lafayette," Cattell said. "We'll deal with what happens there afterwards and concentrate on South Alabama next weekend."

But before the Hilltoppers can set up the final weekend showdown with the Jaguars, Western must find a way to stop a very potent offensive club in New Mexico State (30-20, 7-11 SBC). The Aggies, led by Ryan Kenning's 23 home runs and 93 RBIs, are second in the conference in hitting.

"The way our league has been this year, you don't want to overlook anyone," head coach Joel Murrie said. "In terms of importance, I don't view this weekend any differently than I did last

weekend when we were at Lafayette.

"They hit a lot and we pitch and field a lot. I think they have better pitchers than their numbers indicate."

New Mexico State hasn't fared well on the road, having dropped nine of 12 games away from Las Cruces. It won't get any easier for the Aggies at Nick Denes Field, where the Hilltoppers are 24-3, including a current 12-game winning streak. With three more wins, Western will equal the season record for wins held by the 1988 Hilltoppers.

It's that kind of confidence Western will need to rebound from a season high three-game losing streak. Third baseman Tanner Townsend said the Hilltoppers are confident knowing that seven of their final eight games are at home.

"We love playing here," Townsend said. "We loving hitting here. And our pitchers are very comfortable here. Everything comes together when

The home magic has led to a successful season that many fans didn't see coming. Murrie wouldn't say whether this team was his biggest surprise in his 23 years at Western, but did say this team has been one of his most unselfish.

Hilltoppers split with NMSU

APR 12 2002

By MICHAEL COMPTON
The Daily News

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A baseball team never likes to lose at home, and when that team is battling for a conference championship, such as the case with the Western Kentucky baseball team, the loss stings twice as hard.

The Hilltoppers lost a chance to move within one-half of a game of Sun Belt Conference co-leaders South Alabama and Louisiana-Lafayette, as they split a doubleheader with visiting New Mexico State on Saturday at Nick Denes Field.

Western pounded the Aggies in game one 15-1, but fell in the second game 2-0, in seven innings. The loss ended a 13-game home winning streak.

"It's two different ball games," head coach Joel Murrie said. "We weren't very effective at the plate. With the wind blowing the way it was today, we maybe needed to execute a little bit better."

In the first game, Western staked starter Ryan Bicondoa to an early lead three-run lead.

The Hilltoppers made it 1-0 in the

bottom of the second on a sacrifice fly by left fielder Trevor Keesling. Western added two more runs in the third inning. Catcher Ryan Cattell had an infield single for an RBI and designated hitter Jeff Pacholke walked with the bases loaded to give the Hilltoppers a 3-0 lead.

The Aggies scratched across a run with three straight two-out singles, making the score 3-1 Western.

Center fielder David Lower extended the Hilltopper lead to 4-1 with an RBI double. Lower had two doubles, a walk, a run scored and an RBI in game one.

Western put the game away with eleven runs in the eighth, highlighted by first baseman Nick Turner's two-run single and pinch hitter Matt Wilhite's two-run single.

The Hilltoppers finished the game with a season-high 18 hits. Turner and Pacholke each had three hits and two RBIs to pace Western.

Bicondoa improved to 9-2 for the Hilltoppers. The senior right hander allowed one run in eight innings, scattering seven hits and striking out five Aggie hitters.

"This game is an indication of how talented he is, because he had a mediocre game and held them to one run," Murrie said. "In all sincerity, I thought he was very mediocre today and it was probably the least effective Sun Belt game he has thrown all year. It takes a talented individual to go out there without his best stuff and compete the way he did on the mound."

The win was Bicondoa's eighth straight. Ironically, Bicondoa's last loss was the last time the Hilltoppers have lost at home, a 3-1 loss to Bowling Green on March 16.

In the night cap, New Mexico State jumped ahead with two runs in the fourth.

Hilltopper starter J.C. Faircloth gave up a bases loaded, one-out walk to catcher Erik Winegarden. First baseman Buck Burton followed with a sacrifice fly to give NMSU a 2-0 lead.

The Aggies didn't score again, but New Mexico State starter Jason Williams made the two runs stand up.

See SPLIT, 10B

SPLIT, from 1B

The right hander shut down Western's bats, scattering six hits and striking out three.

"Williams had command of both sides of the plate and you don't see that a lot of times" NMSU coach Gary Ward said. "He got inside of the hitters today and got some fly balls. He had one bad inning where they hit three balls hard and it happened to be right at us."

Faircloth was the tough luck loser for the Hilltoppers. The left hander gave up two runs on seven hits five and two-thirds innings and struck out a career high eight hitters.

"J.C. did outstanding to come in and hold that team to two runs," Murrie said. "It's a team game and we'll bounce back tomorrow. Hopefully, we'll score more than they do."

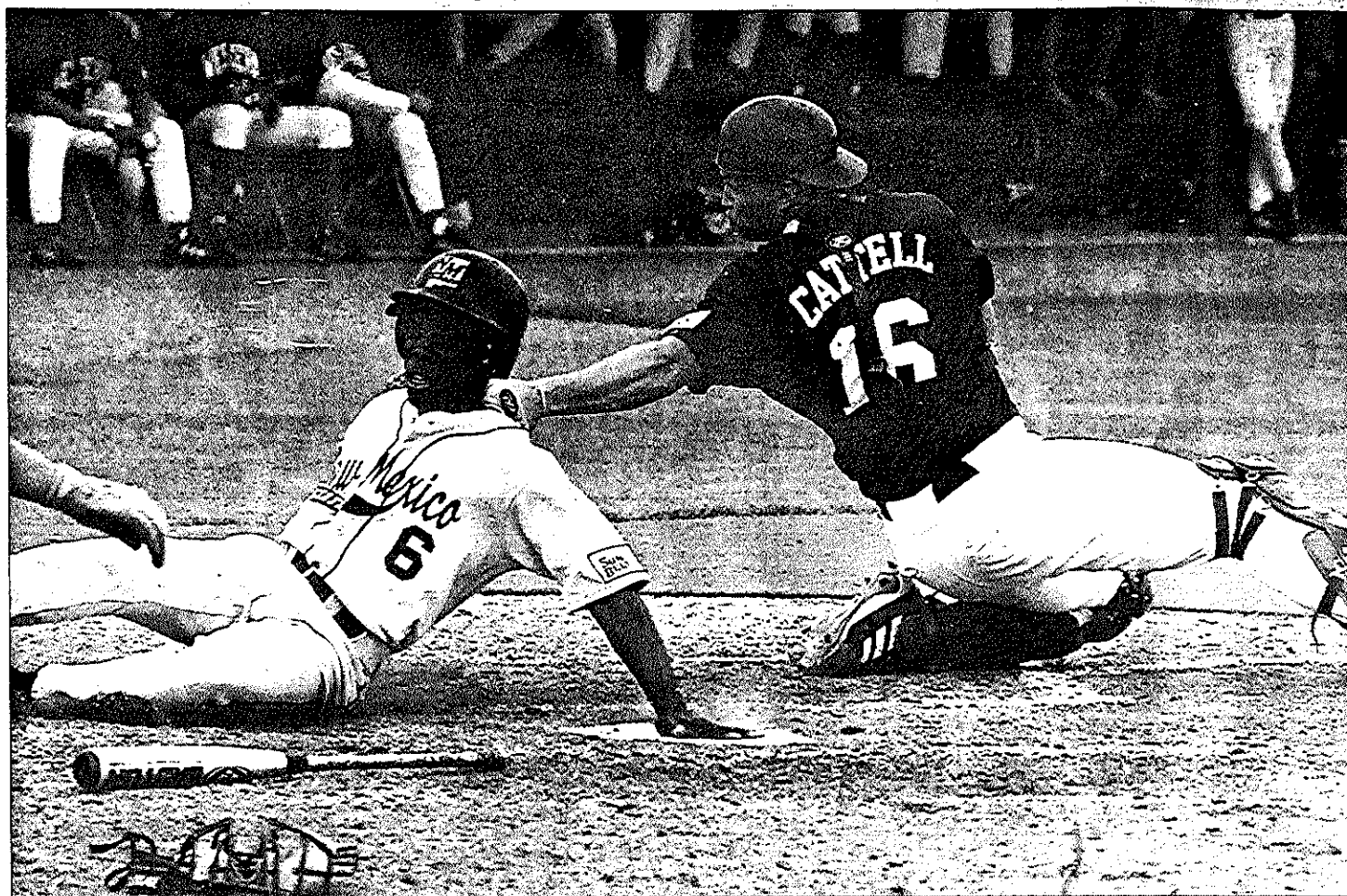
New Mexico State (31-21, 8-12 Sun Belt) and Western Kentucky (33-15, 13-6 SBC) will play the finale of the series today at 1 p.m. With Lafayette and South Alabama squaring off in Mobile, Ala., Western will have to win to remain a game and half back for the conference lead.

Game 1
New Mexico State 000 100 000 - 1 8 2
Western Kentucky 012 001 0(11)x - 15 18 0
WP: Ryan Bicondoa (9-2) LP: Christian Jackson (4-5)
Game 2
New Mexico State 000 200 0 - 2 8 1
Western Kentucky 000 000 0 - 0 6 0
WP: Jason Williams (7-1) LP: J.C. Faircloth (5-3)



Clinton Lewis/Daily News
Western Kentucky shortstop Travis Brown (top) turns a double play over New Mexico State's Alex Borgo in the fifth inning of the first game of a doubleheader on Saturday.

New Mexico State 4, Western Kentucky 2



Clinton Lewis/Daily News

New Mexico State's Kurt Wilkinson (left) slides home as Western Kentucky catcher Ryan Cattell attempts a tag in the Hilltoppers 4-2 Sun Belt Conference loss Sunday at Nick Denes Field.

MAY 13 2002

Tops fall to Aggies

By ROB HERBST
The Daily News

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If the Western Kentucky baseball team doesn't earn a postseason tournament berth, it'll look to this past weekend as a reason why.

New Mexico State, who entered the weekend in sixth place in the Sun Belt Conference, came to Bowling Green and promptly took two of three games from the Hilltoppers, including Sunday's rubber game in 4-2 fashion.

When trying to persuade the NCAA committee for a spot in the 64-team tournament, losing two of three games late in the year to a squad with an RPI rating at 112 doesn't exactly help the Hilltoppers' resume.

"I think it hurt quite a bit," admitted WKU coach Joel Murrie. "I'm not going to sit here and blow smoke. This was a series that not only could keep us in contention for the Sun Belt or top two positions, but in terms of the NCAA, I think the committee is going to use a loss to a team with an RPI of New Mexico State's as a measure against us."

Along with obvious postseason ramifications, why did Sunday's game sting the Hilltoppers so much? Because

Western left 12 runners on base and could have made easy work of the Aggies had it converted the opportunities.

New Mexico State starting pitcher Mike Hale, making his first start in more than two weeks after suffering a shoulder injury, never had any control on the mound as he walked five Hilltoppers in only three innings. Despite the troubles, WKU only had a 2-1 lead after three innings due to Trevor Keesling's second inning RBI double that scored Antone Towns and Nick Turner's sacrifice fly that scored Ryan Cattell.

In the first three innings alone, WKU stranded five runners, had a runner thrown out attempting to steal second and a runner picked off first base.

"For whatever reason, we didn't capitalize and that was the big factor in the ballgame," Murrie said. "It was just a repeat of the second game (Saturday). We just didn't have the production."

Western Kentucky did get a fine performance from starting pitcher Brandon Miller as he threw a season-best 7-2/3 innings. He ran into fifth-inning trouble as New Mexico State's Erik Winegarden doubled in Kurt Wilkerson to tie

the game.

Then with Winegarden on second and Gabe Veloz on first, Miller forced the Aggies' David Licini into a possible inning-ending double play. But WKU shortstop Travis Brown charged the ground ball and booted it, allowing Winegarden to score the eventual game-winning run at 3-2.

New Mexico State took advantage of another Hilltopper miscue for a critical insurance run as Licini singled and found himself on third with two outs.

Murrie brought in relief ace Matt Wilhite for Miller, but Wilhite uncorked a run-scoring wild pitch on his first throw.

The Hilltoppers still had chances to make up for the two miscues as they had runners in scoring position in the fifth, seventh and eighth innings.

But Western failed to score all three times and failed to score at all on New Mexico State's relief duo of Jerrod Marcangelli and Mike Smith. The two threw six scoreless innings of relief and gave up only four hits.

"I don't doubt our players' desire to win," Murrie said. "No one wants to make an out, no one wants to lose, but there's a fine line of doing

what's necessary to get runs across the plate. We chased balls out of the zone and swung at pitches that there was no way we could get on top of."

With only one week of play remaining before next week's Sun Belt Conference Tournament in Mobile, Ala., the Hilltoppers have lost four of their last five and must now regroup for a chance at the NCAA's. There's still time as Western (33-16, 13-8) has five games remaining, beginning with a home date against Kentucky on Tuesday and a road trip to Eastern Kentucky on Wednesday before hosting powerhouse South Alabama in the weekend finale.

If the Hilltoppers can find 40 wins between this week and the double-elimination SBC Tournament, Western's chances for an NCAA trip seem good. But even if WKU doesn't hit that 40-win plateau, Murrie still thinks Western has a shot.

"Forty wins is well within reach and upper 30s or 40 are marks schools shoot for to get into the NCAA's, and we still have that opportunity," Murrie said. "I think 39 would be good. Forty would be better. Those are attainable goals."

New Mexico State 001 020 010 - 4 7 1
Western Kentucky 011 000 000 - 2 8 1
WP — Marcangelli, LP — Miller, S — Smith

Weekend series key for Toppers

By ROB HERBST
The Daily News MAY 17 2012
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The bad news for the Western Kentucky baseball team is that the Hilltoppers are getting possibly their toughest opponent at a crucial time of the season.

The good news is that Western has plenty to gain by having a successful weekend as it hosts No. 15 South Alabama. Winning the three-game series against USA would help Western's case for an at-large bid in the NCAA Tournament. It also would give the Hilltoppers momentum heading into next week's Sun Belt Conference Tournament.

Then there's the regular-season Sun Belt Conference championship. Despite losing two-of-three to New Mexico State last weekend, Western, entrenched in third place, still has a mathematical chance to win the regular-season title — albeit the odds aren't in WKU's favor. Western (35-16, 13-7 SBC) would need a three-game sweep of the Jaguars (36-15, 15-4), plus have Arkansas State win two-of-three at conference power Louisiana-Lafayette (15-6).

"These are tournament-type games for us," WKU coach Joel Murrie said. "Obviously being successful this weekend would put a feather in our cap for the NCAA Tournament committee. And you want to have that high going into the Sun Belt Tournament."

Like it has throughout the season, WKU will use pitcher Ryan Bicondoa (9-2, 2.70 ERA) in what should be a terrific pitching matchup in the 6 p.m. series opener tonight. He'll face Sam Smith (6-1, 3.27), the Sun Belt's reigning Pitcher of the Week.

Bicondoa has been a huge reason why Western is playing for a postseason berth instead of being towards the bottom of the conference as predicted by most preseason polls.

But the sparkling numbers Bicondoa has put up this season are exactly what Murrie expected.

"We expected it from him last year. He pitched well, but the (first-season) transition took

See TOPPERS, 8C

WESTERN, from 1C

a little bit out of him," Murrie said. "He's an example of a very good player who made himself an exceptional ballplayer by working extremely hard. All I know is on Friday nights I feel pretty doggone good when I pencil him in the lineup."

While the year has been special for Bicondoa thus far, he's determined to take Western much further — specifically, its first NCAA trip since 1980.

"Right now I feel like we're going. If they say we're not going, that would be just horrible," Bicondoa said. "Anything other than that would be just unacceptable. It would be a huge letdown."

Western's NCAA chances took a sizable hit last weekend as it lost two-of-three to mediocre New Mexico State.

But the Hilltoppers delivered in what Murrie called must-win games against their in-state rival earlier this week.

Western defeated Kentucky 9-6 on Tuesday and followed that up with an 11-0 win at Eastern Kentucky on Wednesday.

"We were right in the thick of things before last weekend and were really disappointed against New Mexico State," WKU third

baseman Tanner Townsend said. "We didn't hit the ball well and didn't get any timely hits. But at least it was the exact opposite against (Kentucky and Eastern Kentucky). Hopefully that will give us a lift against South Alabama."

That momentum is much needed, considering South Alabama hasn't lost a Sun Belt series this year. South Alabama also needs two victories to clinch the regular-season conference title.

But if Western can earn wins this weekend, it won't have the pressure of needing to win next week's conference tournament for a NCAA bid.

Murrie has thrown out the numbers 39 and 40 as the number of wins needed for a postseason bid. Right now WKU sits at 35, meaning the Hilltoppers must find at least four wins this weekend and during the Sun Belt Tournament to reach that plateau.

If Western can do that, Murrie thinks Western would merit a tournament bid.

"We've had a great year and it's not over yet," Murrie said. "We've performed at a level that needs recognition in the elite group of teams."

Briefly

*From staff and
wire reports.*

Western baseball game postponed

Due to the inclement weather that made its way through Bowling Green, Friday's Sun Belt Conference baseball game between Western Kentucky and South Alabama was postponed.

The two clubs will now open their three-game series Saturday with a 1 p.m. doubleheader at Western's Nick Denes Field. Saturday will also be Senior Day at WKU as the Hilltoppers honor their nine seniors on the 2002 club. The Hilltoppers and Jaguars will wrap up the series Sunday with a 1 p.m. game.

The series is the final three regular-season games for both clubs, which will begin the Sun Belt Conference Tournament Wednesday in Mobile, Ala. Entering this final series, USA sits atop the conference standings at 15-4, while the Hilltoppers are in third place with a 13-7 mark in league play.

Topplers settle for split

By ROB HERBST
The Daily News
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Considering No. 15 South Alabama hasn't lost two Sun Belt Conference games in a weekend this year, trying to beat the Jaguars twice in one day was a major chore for Western Kentucky.

The Hilltoppers did have a chance to accomplish the impressive feat after winning game one of their doubleheader 13-4, but WKU missed out in several scoring chances as it fell 4-2 in the nightcap.

With the doubleheader split, the Hilltoppers are now locked in as the Sun Belt's No. 3 seed in next week's conference tournament. Western (36-17, 14-8) can seriously help its NCAA Tournament chance by winning the weekend series over South Alabama (37-16, 16-5) at 1 p.m. today.

The Hilltoppers could have truly greatly enhanced their postseason chances had they converted on several scoring opportunities against South Alabama starting pitcher Sam Smith in game two of the doubleheader Saturday.

Western began the first inning with a David Lower single and Tanner Townsend double. But with the runners on second and third and nobody out, Western's heart of the order failed to knock in either as Smith came back with two straight strikeouts and then got Antoine Towns to ground out. It was only a prelude of things to come for Western.

"How often can a coach say he's disappointed that they didn't sweep the 15th ranked club in the country," said WKU coach Joel Murrie. "That's the feeling though. Not to sound negative because we had a great effort from our ballclub, but it's disappointing knowing you had a chance to sweep."

runners in scoring position with less than two outs in the second, fourth, fifth and sixth innings, but managed only two bases-loaded walks in the fourth inning for its two runs.

That wasn't enough against South Alabama's offensive attack which entered Saturday's doubleheader with all nine regular starters batting at least .300.

The Jaguars finally showed that prowess in the third inning as it took a lead for the first time in either game.

Erik Smallwood crushed a two-run homer down the rightfield line off WKU starting freshman pitcher J.C. Faircloth. Jansen Rayborn then scored on a two-out infield error to put USA up 3-0.

USA's Shane Scoville then led off the fourth with a solo homer off Faircloth.

"There's always a crucial point of the ballgame that decides a competitive game against a good opponent," Murrie said. "We had

our opportunities and didn't hit on them."

Western Kentucky tried a comeback in the fourth inning on three consecutive singles to load the bases. Trevor Keesling walked to cut WKU's deficit to 4-1 with still nobody out.

But much like Smith's effort in the first inning, he struck out the side although he did give up another bases loaded walk to David Lower for a 4-2 South Alabama lead and eventual win.

"I'm kind of pleased because we still have a chance to win the series," said Western rightfielder Antoine Towns. "South Alabama is a great team and to take two of three would be a great accomplishment for us."

The Western Kentucky offense which couldn't convert on chances in game two, had an easy time of it in the first game with a 13-4 win.

Western pounded out a six-run, **See TOPPERS, 3B**

TOPPERS, from 1B

sixth inning highlighted by Trevor Keesling's grand slam that stayed barely fair inside the left field pole. It was only his second homer of the year and the second grand slam for the Hilltoppers this season.

Towns, WKU's freshman rightfielder/football quarterback also delivered for the Hilltoppers. He was 4-for-5 with two doubles, four RBIs and two runs in game one and followed that up with a 2-for-4 effort in game two.

Towns now has a nine-game hitting streak and has a four multiple-hit game in his last five tries - all coming after a slump he suffered while doing double duty with spring football and baseball.

"I'm been able to focus more and concentrate on one sport and that's helped," Towns said. "I was getting drained, but now with football aside, it helps."

The run support was enough for ace Ryan Bicondoa who made his final start at Nick Denes Field. He threw seven innings, gave up three runs on six hits and struck out eight.

South Alabama 001 110 010-4
Western Kentucky 021 206 20x-13
WP — Ryan Bicondoa (10-2). LP — Clark Girardeau (8-5). HR — Trevor Keesling.

South Alabama 003 100 0-4
Western Kentucky 000 200 0-2
WP — Sam Smith (6-2). LP — J.C. Faircloth (5-4). HR — Erik Smallwood, Shane Scoville.



Joe Imel/Daily News
Western Kentucky third baseman Tanner Townsend knocks down a line drive in the second game of Saturday's doubleheader against South Alabama.

Jags take series with WKU

MAY 20 2002

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News

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The Western Kentucky baseball team was locked into the role of spoiler for Sunday's regular-season finale against Sun Belt Conference foe South Alabama.

The Hilltoppers already were seeded third in the SBC Tournament, but could deny the Jaguars the regular-season league title with a win.

South Alabama (38-16, 17-5) had no problem dispatching Western, however, and claimed its 11th Sun Belt title with a 13-7 win.

"I tip my cap to them. They did a great job this season," WKU coach Joel Murrie said. "They didn't play just one weekend of baseball or two days of baseball, they played eight weeks of baseball because they didn't lose a series the whole year. That's what a championship team has to do."

The Jags buried Western (36-18, 14-9) with a pair of big innings. South Alabama posted five runs in both the third and sixth innings.

"The standings, the score of the game - I don't think any of that should be a factor in how you approach what you do. We got beat today," Murrie said. "It was basically a two-inning ballgame for them offensively. We just got beat."

Erik Smallwood hit a one-out triple in the first off WKU starter Brandon Miller and scored on a sacrifice fly by Jansen Rayborn.

After Western went down in order in the bottom of the first, South Alabama added another run in the top of the second.

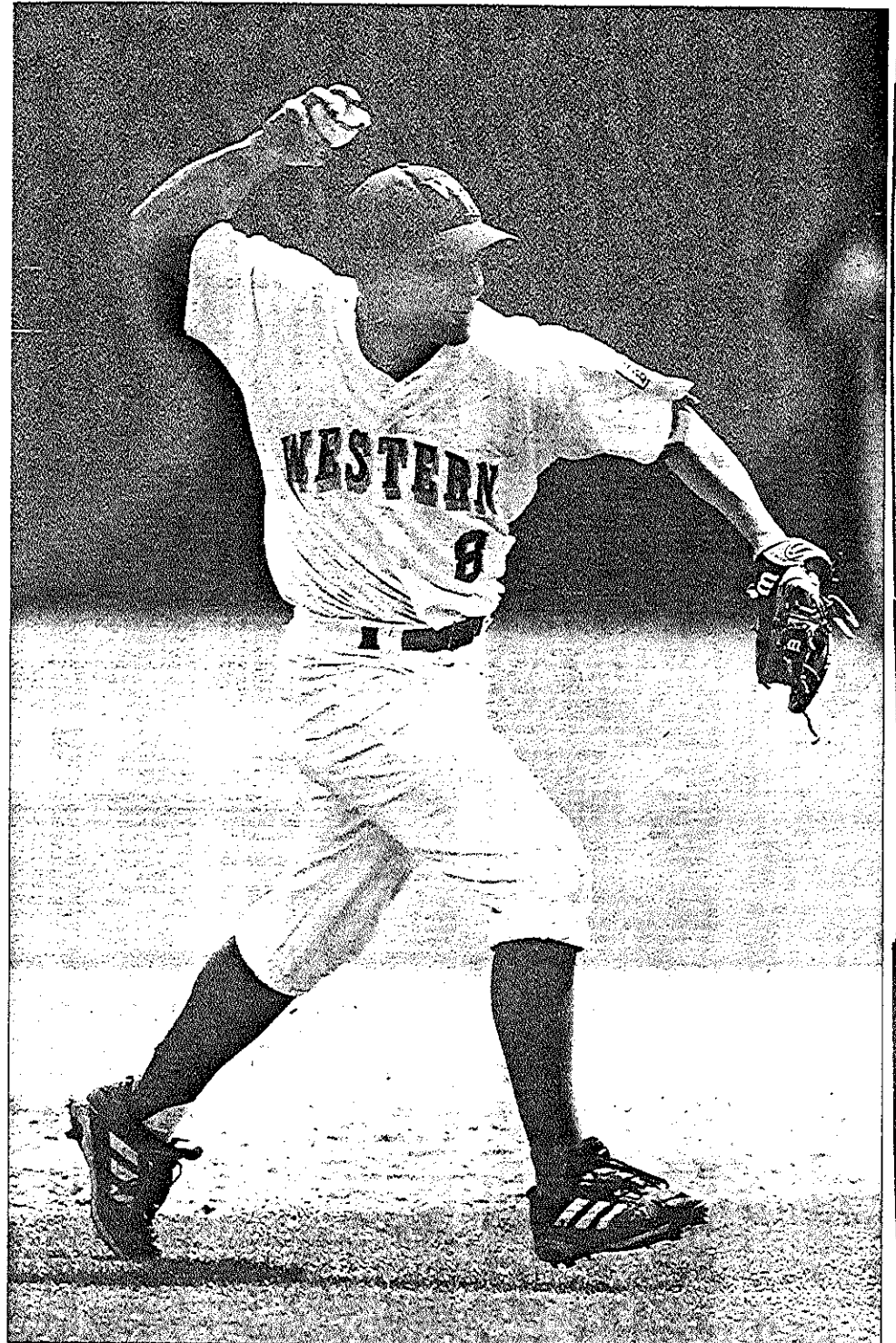
Shane Scoville doubled to lead off the inning, advanced to third on a ground out by Kevin Sytko and scored on a bunt single by Brett Parker.

Western took its first (and only) lead in the top of the third as Jeff Pacholke, Patrick Ransdell and David Lower each singled in a run.

South Alabama chased Miller from the game in the bottom of the third when it scored five runs on three hits.

Despite losing the lead so early, Murrie said he still thought his club had a chance to get back into the game.

"I thought that at 7-3 that would not be enough runs to beat us - and it was not," Murrie said. "We corrected



Western Kentucky shortstop Travis Brown guns a runner down at first base Sunday in the Toppers 13-7 loss to 15th ranked South Alabama at Nick Denes Field.

Joe Imel/Daily News

after that; it was the later five-run inning that really took the toll on us."

After adding another run in the bottom of the fourth, the Jags plated five more in the sixth. Jason Gross jacked a two-run homer and T.J. Touchstone added a two-run double.

Western scored four runs over the last two innings - Kevin Bearden hit a two-run

homer in the eighth and Antone Towns singled in a pair of runs in the ninth - but it was too little.

"You look back at some of the things that we did and how well we executed and that makes me think that this club still has an opportunity to win a championship," Murrie said.

"Now if just has to be the tournament championship as

opposed to the regular-season championship."

Western will take on sixth-seeded New Mexico State in the Sun Belt Tournament on Wednesday in Mobile, Ala., at 9:30 a.m.

South Alabama 115 105 000 - 13 13 0
Western Kentucky 030 000 022 - 7 9 1

WP - Spivey (4-3), LP - Miller (2-5), HR - Smallwood (USA), Gross (USA), Bearden (WKU).

Murrie's Toppers looking and hoping for tournament bid

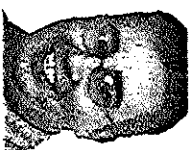
No coach is a stauncher pro-motor of his players than Western Kentucky baseball coach Joel Murrie.

Ask Murrie about the NCAA Tournament and he'll glowingly say players like standout pitcher Ryan Bicondon and senior Tanner Townsend deserve to play in the NCAA Tournament before their collegiate careers end.

They've meant plenty to Hilltopper baseball and Murrie wants to see them justly rewarded.

And he's probably right, but it might not come true. Consider this fact: The Sun

Belt Conference is ranked fifth by one poll and Western has locked up the No. 3 spot in the conference. In NCAA hoops last year, the fifth-ranked conference according to RPI ratings was the PAC-10 Conference. And California ended up as the third-best team by RPI standards.



ROB HERBST
Sports writer

No stink was made whether or not Cal deserved a postseason bid. Of course they did. But the same rules don't apply for the Hilltoppers.

One doubt popping up is whether the Hilltoppers are truly one of college baseball's top 64 teams, thanks to an RPI rating that's nothing to brag about. The Sun Belt Conference RPI is strong, but Western's individual RPI rating isn't. But in the world of college baseball, your RPI can only be as good as the teams in your region.

Like many college baseball teams, Western Kentucky doesn't have the luxury, or finances, to hop on a plane for a three-game series against the nation's best in hopes of improving an RPI rating.

The pool of available quality, non-conference opponents for Western to play is limited. That doesn't exactly help the RPI. Instead, the Hilltoppers' non-conference schedule has to mainly revolve around making one-day bus trips to Austin Peay or Eastern Kentucky.

Hopefully that won't ruin Western's chances, but it might. Not only do Murrie's players deserve it, but also Murrie himself deserves another trip to the NCAA Tournament.

In his 23rd year as head Western coach, Murrie has made only one trip to the tournament. Any coach who stays at one school for that long certainly deserves more, especially one that stays at a "non-baseball school" and has won more than 700 games there.

No matter how much Murrie would pooch-pooch the idea and maybe resent getting patted on the back, he is the definition of Western Kentucky baseball. He is easily the most intellectual coach to talk to — no offense to any coaches who give me those tired clichés about "110 percent" every day.

Ridin' the pine

What WKU football coach Jack Harbaugh is to witty one-liners — which I appreciate, since it makes my job easier — Murrie is to thoughts that go over my head at times.

When previewing the South Alabama series with Murrie, the wordsmith somehow used the phrase "laissez-faire" in a baseball discussion last week.

Two days later, he jokingly asked why that didn't make my story. Heck, I didn't know what he was talking about.

The dictionary does inform me laissez-faire means "a philosophy or practice characterized by a usually deliberate abstention from direction or interference especially with individual freedom of choice and action."

Instead of teaching his Scientific Principles of Coaching course at Western, he could easily fill any opening in the English department.

Maybe Murrie will be able to spew those words of wisdom on a national scene in two weeks with a possible NCAA Tournament bid. Maybe they'll get shut out yet again. No matter what happens though, everybody involved with the Hilltopper baseball deserves the tournament reward.

— Rob Herbst is a sports writer for *The Daily News*. His column appears every other Monday.

MAY 21 2012

Toppers set for Sun Belt tourney

By OJ STAPLETON
The Daily News

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Western Kentucky isn't going into the Sun Belt Conference baseball tournament on a roll.

After rolling through much of the SBC season, the Hilltoppers (36-18, 14-9 SBC) dropped their last three conference series and finished third behind South Alabama and Louisiana-Lafayette.

"That's obviously a concern, but it's not as bad because the last two weeks, our pitchers have done an outstanding job," said WKU coach Joel Murrie. "If I was going in with questions about our pitching staff, knowing that we were going to have to play four or five games after a short duration, then I would be concerned. Pitching has not been our problem, though."

This past weekend, the Hilltoppers beat South Alabama 13-4 in the first game of the series before losing 4-2 and 13-7 in the final two games.

In each of Western's last three series, the Toppers have won the first game (with ace pitcher Ryan Bicondoa on the mound) before falling in the second two.

Bicondoa is 10-2 on the season with a 2.77 ERA. He has not lost a Sun Belt game and Murrie said that he would "definitely" pitch in the opening game Wednesday at 9:30 a.m. against sixth-seeded New Mexico State.

"I think he's the pitcher of the year in the league, and I don't know of anybody in the conference that would be looking forward to seeing him," Murrie said.

Bicondoa also has a team record 138 strikeouts on the season.

Western played the Aggies in a series before South Alabama.

"They're a team that has relied on its offense all year, but when they came into our place, they played outstanding defense and got solid pitching performances," Murrie said.

If the Hilltoppers get past New Mexico State, they will take on the winner of Louisiana-Lafayette and Arkansas State on Thursday.

The championship game will be Saturday.

Murrie would not say if there was a chance Bicondoa could come back and pitch Saturday after going on Wednesday.

"There's a fine line between feeling he's able to pitch and jeopardizing his professional career. We all want to win, but you don't put anyone in any danger of permanent injury," he said. "I'm not going to do that to him, but knowing Ryan, if we're playing in the championship game, he's going to want the ball."

An NCAA Tournament berth also could be on the line.

Murrie said he was not sure if his team would be in without winning the conference title.

"More often than not, previous years' reputations in the NCAA becomes a factor in the minds of the selection committee. That may be something that's denied, but you watch Miami get in with a game over .500 record this year," Murrie said. "The only thing we can do is play for a conference championship and see what happens on Saturday."

Briefly

From staff and wire reports.

Murrie wins coach of the year award

Western Kentucky baseball coach Joel Murrie was named Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year on Tuesday, while ace Ryan Bicondoa earned conference Pitcher of the Year and first team all-SBC.

Senior third baseman Tanner Townsend and junior reliever Matt Wilhite were on the first squad. Catcher Ryan Cattell also garnered recognition, named to the all-conference second team.

Murrie led WKU to a 36-18 overall record, including a third place finish in the Sun Belt with a 14-9 mark after being picked to finish in a tie for seventh in the league's preseason coaches poll.

With a good showing at the conference tournament, his Hilltoppers may give WKU its second appearance in the NCAA tournament. He led the Hilltoppers to a season-high 10-game winning streak (March 31-April 13) that included a 13-6 win over Vanderbilt, a series sweep of No. 24 Florida International, and a 10-9 victory over nationally ranked Louisville.

Bicondoa finished the regular season with a perfect 8-0 record in SBC starts, including a miniscule 2.28 ERA to go along with 86 strikeouts in 67.0 innings pitched. Overall, he finished with a 10-2 mark, including a school-record 138 strikeouts and a 2.77 ERA.

He made seven consecutive starts in which he fanned at least 10 batters and is currently 14th in the nation in strikeouts per nine innings, averaging 11.

Townsend earns first team honors after batting .342 with eight home runs and a team-leading 50 RBIs during the regular season. He also led the Hilltoppers with 18 stolen bases, 57 runs scored and 66 hits, all in a team-high 53 games played.

Wilhite, a Franklin-Simpson High School graduate, has consistently been one of the league's most dominant relief pitchers this season, finishing with a 7-2 record and a 1.91 ERA in a school record 31 appearances.

He also recorded seven saves, which ties for the second-most ever in a single season at WKU, and fanned 42 batters while giving up only 12 walks.

Cattell finished regular-season play with a .337 batting average and a team-leading nine home runs.

WKU was scheduled to take on New Mexico State in the first round of the SBC Tournament this morning in Mobile, Ala.

Hilltoppers walk past Ragin' Cajuns

By MICHEAL COMPTON

The Daily News MAY 24 2012

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MOBILE, Ala. — Senior second baseman Patrick Ransdell normally doesn't bat second.

But with starting third baseman Tanner Townsend not in the lineup, head coach Joel Murrie gave Ransdell the opportunity. The move paid off as Ransdell drew a bases loaded walk in the bottom of the 10th, giving Western Kentucky a 2-1 victory over Louisiana-Lafayette during a Sun Belt Conference Tournament elimination game Thursday.

The game featured outstanding performances by starting pitchers Ryan Bicondoa for WKU and Justin Gabriel for ULL.

"It's the proverbial 'a shame someone had to lose,'" Murrie said. "Two great competitors today, that I think were very much up to the challenge today. Fortunately for us Ryan got the upper hand."

In a game where every pitch seemed important, Bicondoa and Gabriel gave hitters few scoring opportunities.

The Ragin' Cajuns got on the board in the third without the benefit of a hit.

Justin Bourque led off and was hit by a pitch. He advanced to second on a wild pitch and moved to third on a sacrifice. Three batters later, Bourque scored on a swinging third strike by Charles Redmond that would have ended the inning. Instead, the ball squirted past WKU catcher Ryan

Bicondoa: Western's ace in the hole

By MICHEAL COMPTON

The Daily News

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MOBILE, Ala. — With the season on the line Thursday, Western Kentucky baseball coach Joel Murrie had a proverbial ace up his sleeve.

For the ninth time this season, Ryan Bicondoa took the mound against a Sun Belt Conference opponent. And just like the eight previous starts, Bicondoa left the mound as the winning pitcher.

Exactly what one would expect from the Sun Belt Conference Pitcher of the Year.

And while Wednesday's loss easily could have added to the pressure of starting Thursday, Bicondoa said the start was just like any other start he's made this season.

"I never gave it much thought," Bicondoa said. "I just looked at it like I was playing catch with (catcher Ryan) Cattell. It felt like I was out there warming up."

Cattell and ULL had a 1-0 lead.

Western pulled even in the bottom of the fourth on a sacrifice fly by Cattell. It was the Hilltoppers' first run of the tournament.

That was all the scoring for the next five innings, as Bicondoa and Gabriel matched each other pitch for pitch. Western got the game-winning rally in the 10th inning.

Jerry Cecil led off with a solid single to left. Townsend, who did not start after being hit by a pitch in Wednesday's game, followed with a bloop to left, putting runners at first and second. Matt Wilhite, who started at third for Townsend, sacrificed Cecil and Townsend to second and third.

After the Ragin' Cajuns intentionally walked Travis Brown, David Lower hit into a force play.

The Hilltoppers got the winning run four pitches later as Ransdell walked, forcing Townsend across home plate.

Ransdell said he became more comfortable with each pitch during the at-bat.

"I was looking for a pitch to drive, but he never threw anything across the plate," Ransdell said.

Murrie added that he was confident Ransdell would end the game.

"There's not a player that I wanted at the plate against a left-handed pitcher more than Patrick

Bicondoa's final stats included two hits, one unearned run, 12 strikeouts and two walks. It was the ninth time this season Bicondoa struck out at least 10 hitters.

It's those kind of numbers that has made game-day preparation a little easier for Murrie.

"You approach every game the same, but when you got Ryan Bicondoa on the mound, you smile a little bit more and anticipate just a little more than you would for other instances," Murrie said.

Thursday was no different as Louisiana-Lafayette's hitters were frustrated all day. The senior gave up a solid single to center field Chase Lambin in the fourth inning and an infield single to Corey Coles in the sixth. After that he retired 13 of the last 15 batters he faced. And if not for a passed ball on a third strike in the third inning, Bicondoa could have easily recorded his second shut-out.

See BICONDOA, 5C

Ransdell," Murrie said. "He is the best on our ballclub against left-handed pitchers."

With the win, Western (37-19) advanced to a 9:30 a.m. elimination game against Arkansas State today. If the Hilltoppers prevail, they will face New Mexico State in a rematch from Wednesday's game at 3:30. Louisiana-Lafayette (37-21) exits the tournament and will find out Monday if it will play in the NCAA tournament. The Ragin' Cajuns need an at-large bid but are expected by many to be a lock for the tournament.

Louisiana-Lafayette 001 000 000 0-120
Western Kentucky 000 100 000 1-251

BICONDOA, from 1C

against ULL in the last two seasons.

But perhaps his greatest accomplishment Thursday was keeping bragging rights over former teammate Justin Gabriel. The duo played together at Lassen Junior College in Susanville, Calif. Thursday was the second time this season the duo have locked horns, with Bicondoa prevailing both times.

Bicondoa admitted that having Gabriel on the other side got his competitive juices flowing.

"I get fired up when I pitch against him, but I don't approach it like it's me against him," Bicondoa said.

Gabriel, who pitched 9-2/3 innings before allowing the game winning run on a bases loaded walk, said pitching against his

former teammate only added to Thursday's competitive atmosphere.

"When you get between the lines, you can take that emotion and get yourself fired up," Gabriel said. "It makes pitching a lot of fun."

The duo quietly exchanged congratulations with each other outside the media tent, wishing each other success the rest of the year.

And while Gabriel will almost certainly be pitching in next weekend's NCAA tournament, Thursday could have been Bicondoa's final performance for Western Kentucky.

If that's the case, the right-hander made sure that he saved for last perhaps his best performance in a stellar season.

WKU fails in SBC Tourney

MAY 23 2002

By MICHAEL COMPTON

The Daily News

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MOBILE, Ala. — It's safe to say the Western Kentucky baseball team has seen enough of New Mexico State pitcher Jason Williams.

For the second time in less than two weeks, Williams blanked the No. 3 seed Hilltoppers, as the Aggies used a five-run sixth inning to propel to a 6-0 victory in the opening round of the Sun Belt Conference Tournament Wednesday at Stanky Field. Head coach Joel Murrie had nothing but praise for the

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Aggies' starter.

"He's definitely not a one-hit wonder," Murrie said. "He's now gone 16 innings of shut-out ball against us. That's quite a feat in college baseball. He definitely had control of the game." Although the No. 6 seed Aggies chose to use their top starter, the Hilltoppers countered with Jeffy J.C. Faircloth instead of Sun Belt Conference

Pitcher of the Year Ryan Bicouda.

Murrie said that starting Bicouda Wednesday on three days' rest was never an option.

"There was no gamble today," Murrie said. "There was no doubt last Saturday when Ryan threw his first pitch against South Alabama that he was not going to pitch game one today.

"I thought J.C. pitched a good ballgame. He gave up one hard hit and walked a guy with the bases loaded. Other than that I thought he threw a quality ballgame."

NMSU got its first run in the top of the second with a little

help from the Hilltopper defense. First baseman David Lickin led off the inning and advanced to second on a throwing error by Western shortstop Travis Brown.

One batter later, Brown committed his second error of the inning, misplaying a ground ball by left fielder Bradton Shaw.

Lickin moved to third on the play and scored on a sacrifice fly by third baseman Hal Bisnett, giving the Aggies a 1-0 lead.

The Aggies blew the game open in the sixth, hitting five runs.

Bisnett drew a bases-loaded walk to extend the lead to 2-0.

Right fielder Jesse French, hitless in his previous 17 at-bats, followed with a base-clearing double, making the score 5-0 New Mexico State.

Two batters later, French scored on a balk by WKU reliever Adam Prida, giving the Aggies a 6-0 advantage.

That was more than enough for Williams. The right-hander survived a rocky first two batters to pitch his second shutout of the season against WKU, limiting the Hilltoppers to seven hits.

"His performance was really extraordinary," Aggies head coach Gary Ward said. "He has struggled with shoulder stiffness

for about four weeks now. We had him use the changeup pre-

dominantly for the first four innings until he started feeling good about his fastball."

Faircloth lasted 5 1/3 innings, allowing six runs, four earned, while striking out eight Aggie hitters.

Western (36-19) played Louisiana-Lafayette, who fell 10-3 to Arkansas State, in the elimination round of the tournament at 9:30 a.m. today. New Mexico State (34-23) will play Arkansas State in the winners' bracket at 3:30 p.m. today.

New Mexico State 010 005 000-6 9 3
Western Kentucky 000 000 000-0 7 4
WP — Williams (8-1), LP — Faircloth (6-5)

Aggies still have Western's number

May 25, 2002

New Mexico State knocks Toppers out of SBC baseball tourney

By MICHAEL COMPTON

The Daily News

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MOBILE, Ala. — If the Western Kentucky baseball team doesn't get a call from the NCAA selection committee, it can look at their performance against New Mexico State in the last two weeks as a major reason for the postseason snub.

For the fourth time in five games, and the second time in three days, the Hilltoppers fell to the Aggies, as NMSU scored four runs in the fifth inning and held on for a 7-5 victory in an elimination game of the 2002

Sun Belt Conference Tournament in Mobile, Ala. The loss came hours after Western stayed alive with a 9-8 come-from-behind win against Arkansas.

"They have a solid ball club and they pitched us effectively," head coach Joel Murrie said. "We hit the ball well, but there were some key situations where you'd like to pick up one more hit and I think we could have."

Unlike the first meeting in the tournament on Wednesday, the Hilltoppers and Aggies battled back and forth in a close game that came down to the last pitch.

New Mexico State took advantage of two walks and took a 1-0 lead in the first on an RBI single by second baseman Cabe Veloz.

Western answered in the top of the second with an RBI ground out by shortstop Travis Brown that tied the score, 1-1.

One inning later, the Hilltoppers took a 2-1 lead on an RBI double by right fielder Antoine Towns.

The Aggies took the lead in the bottom of the fifth with four runs. Third baseman Hal Bisnett led off the inning with a solo home run to tie the score 2-2. NMSU then proceeded to load the bases with one man out and took advantage of two fielder's choices and a walk to build a 5-2 advantage.

Western cut the margin to 5-3 in the top of the seventh, but New Mexico State plated two more runs in the bottom of the inning to extend the lead to 7-3.

WKU fought back with two runs in the eighth on RBI singles by Jerry Cecil and Brown, making the score 7-5 NMSU. The Hilltoppers had a chance to tie it with the bases loaded and two out in the ninth, but Towns struck out to end the game.

With the win New Mexico State (36-23) advances to the championship game today against either South Alabama or FIU.

Western finishes at 38-20 and will now have to wait until Monday at 11:30 a.m. to learn if they will receive an at-large bid in the NCAA Tournament.

Murrie said if it was up to him, Western has more than made its case.

"I said all along that 39 wins was a big factor," Murrie said. "But there have been some teams

that have been eliminated early in tournaments in other leagues and were bubble clubs. The fact that we extended our tournament more than maybe some other clubs, we'll see.

"I think you have to look at the fact that we were 9-4 against the upper echelon in the Sun Belt Conference. That ought to carry some weight."

The Hilltoppers advanced to the NMSU game thanks to a 9-8 victory over No. 7 seed Arkansas State in an elimination game Friday morning.

Western rallied from an early 5-2 deficit, taking an 8-6 lead into the seventh inning before the Indians (23-35) answered with one in the seventh and one in the eighth to tie the score 8-all.

Ryan Cattell gave WKU the

lead for good with a towering blast to left leading off the ninth. "I was looking for a good pitch to drive," Cattell said. "Earlier he struck me out on a curveball, so I was looking for his fast ball. It was a 2-0 count and he threw his fast ball and I got a good swing on the ball."

Pitcher Matt Whitte pitched two innings and improved to 8-2 on the season.

The former Franklin-Stimpson standout also had a solid day at the plate, tallying three hits and three RBIs.

Western Kentucky 002 211 291-9 12 1
Arkansas State 023 010 110-6 9 2
WP — Matt Whitte (8-2), LP — Ryan Hamilton (1-4) HR — Ryan Cattell

Western Kentucky 010 100 180-5 12 0
New Mexico State 100 040 208-7 9 2
WP — Christian Jackson (6-5), LP — Gary Hinchman (1-3) St. Andrew Garipson (5) HR — Hal Bisnett

Briefly

*From staff and
wire reports.*

Western fails to make tournament

The Western Kentucky baseball team was not selected to the NCAA tournament, despite four teams from the Sun Belt Conference receiving selections.

The Hilltoppers (38-20) finished third in the Sun Belt Conference and went 2-2 in last week's Conference Championship in Mobile, Ala., falling to New Mexico State twice in three days.

The Aggies received the conference's automatic bid, by virtue of their 20-9 victory over South Alabama in last Saturday's championship game, and will open against Houston in Tempe, Ariz., on Friday.

South Alabama, who finished as the regular season champ, will play Kent State on Friday; while Louisiana-Lafayette opens against Tulane in Baton Rouge, La.

Florida International, who finished behind Western in the regular season, was the fourth Sun Belt team selected. The Golden Panthers will play Miami (Fla.) on Thursday in Gainesville, Fla.

Indians to hold tryouts at WKU

By ROB HERBST
The Daily News

June 22, 2002
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High school and college baseball players always hold onto dreams of playing baseball professionally and the Cleveland Indians are searching for those guys.

On Wednesday, the Indians organization will hold an open tryout camp for prospective professional baseball players between the ages of 16-22 at Western Kentucky University's Nick Denes Field.

The odds of actually signing a contract through an open tryout camp are minimal, but not impossible. Back in 1995, Western Kentucky pitcher and Glasgow native Matt Bowles signed a contract with the Milwaukee Brewers through a camp.

"It is rare, but it does happen," said Indians scout Scott Barnsby.

More realistic than signing a contract is the opportunity to simply get noticed by a professional baseball team.

On Wednesday, Barnsby and other camp directors will test players' running speed, defensive ability, arm strength and raw offensive power.

If a prospective player showcases competent baseball tools, the Indians will remember him.

Barnsby estimates about 25 to 30 players usually attend tryout camps.

"Mainly we're trying to find guys that we didn't previously know about and create a list of guys to keep in contact with," Barnsby said. "Then we'll see how they do next spring and follow up with them."

The camp isn't only for the Indians to scout players, but also for Western Kentucky to take a look at local players interested in playing college baseball.

WKU coach Joel Murrie will make sure to keep a close eye on talent Wednesday.

"What's better? I walk out of the office and watch a kid work out," Murrie said. "It's a win-win situation for the university, for the pro club and for the young men that want exposure — not only to professional opportunities but to college coaches."

Along with the Indians, other clubs, such as the Baltimore Orioles, Cincinnati Reds and Pittsburgh Pirates, have conducted camps at WKU in the past.

Camp registration will begin at 9 a.m., with the camp starting 30 minutes later.

Players must furnish their own uniforms, gloves and shoes. American Legion players are also required to provide a signed letter from their coach/post commander granting permission to attend the camp.

And also bring dreams of furthering a baseball career.

"A lot of the younger kids come in with the aspirations and dreams of signing a professional contract," Murrie said. "For a lot of the older players, they're hoping for that one last chance for somebody to like them and give them an opportunity to play."

Western catcher looks to transfer

Bicondoa to make pro debut in Staten Island

By ROB HERBST
The Daily News JUN 21 2002
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The Western Kentucky baseball team knew it was going to lose two catchers after this past season, but the former Bowling Green High School standout Kenneth Yeager has become the third.

Yeager has decided to leave Western and transfer to NCAA Division II Francis Marion University in Florence, S.C. Yeager's departure leaves a void at catcher as Ryan Cattell and Brian Polson finished up their eligibility this season.

But Yeager's decision to transfer didn't come as a surprise to WKU coach Joel Murrie.

"Kenneth approached me late in the season and felt like it was in his best interest that he went somewhere else to maximize his playing opportunities," Murrie said. "I really respect Kenneth and the mature nature with which he approached this decision. He displayed a lot of character. Obviously I wish that he remain in our program, but I respect his wishes."

Yeager could not be reached for further comment.

As a sophomore this past season, Yeager was a part-time player as he batted .296 in 25 games. He also scored eight runs and had two RBIs. Defensively, Yeager threw out 25 percent of the runners that tried to steal on him.

With Yeager leaving, the Hilltoppers have only Kevin Bearden with any experience behind the plate.

Bearden saw action in 33 games last season, batting .156 with one home run and seven RBIs.

Last year Francis Marion went 26-27 and finished seventh in the Peach Belt Conference regular-season standings.

"I think he's a step-in-and-play guy," Murrie said. "He's a player that developed and matured in our program over the last few years and I think it's going to pay off for Francis Marion. I venture to say there won't be a finer catcher in the league than Kenneth Yeager."

"Kenneth is a true Division I defensive catcher," Francis Marion coach Art Inabinet said in a statement. "He is a good gap hitter and may also see some playing time in the outfield."

Former WKU pitcher Ryan Bicondoa will make his first professional start with the Staten Island Yankees in the Class A New York-Penn League on Saturday against the New Jersey Cardinals.

Bicondoa signed a contract with the Yankees organization only days after completing his sterling senior season.

The Lovelock, Nev., native was 11-2 with a 2.55 ERA, 150 strikeouts and only 35 walks. He was named the Sun Belt Conference's Pitcher of the Year.

At home on the field

Home-school athlete aiming to play at Western

By MICHAEL COMPTON JUL 17 2002
The Daily News
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As a home-schooled athlete, Dennis Winn has traveled a different path on his journey through the baseball diamond.

While many of his Kentucky Colonel teammates spend the spring playing against each other in high school baseball, Winn has to drive from his Bowling Green home to Nashville to play – and that's if his team has a home game.

Still, Winn has prospered for the Colonels, hitting .419 with eight doubles, three homers and 20 RBIs. Colonels coach Chris Gage said Winn's success can be traced to his work ethic.

"He brings a professional attitude to the ballpark day in and day out," Gage said. "He's no nonsense. He's always working extra. He'll take ground balls for hours. He'll work on his hitting. He's very coachable. He'll do what you ask him and play where you want him to play."

The hard work and dedication has paid dividends. He was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies in the 48th round of last month's Major League Baseball Amateur Draft, but opted instead to attend Western Kentucky University.

The attention of scouts and Winn's smooth transition from home school to the Kentucky Colonels is even more impressive when you consider his playing career is still in its infancy.

Winn, a middle infielder, didn't start playing baseball until he was 9, even though his family has been involved with baseball all of his life. His father, Earl Winn, is a scout for the Kansas City Royals. And while his dad always has been there for encouragement, Winn said he was fortunate that baseball has always been his choice.

"One of the big things is he never pressed it upon me to play," Winn said. "It was always my decision. He just asked me to work hard."

"I didn't play until I was 9 because I didn't feel like I was ready. I think that's the reason I love baseball so much is because it's always been my desire to play and no one else's."

Although his career in organized baseball began later than most, it doesn't mean Winn wasn't on the field before that. Winn said he remembers playing with major league players Rafael Palmerio and Will Clark when he was younger.

"I went down to some camps that Dad helped with when he was working for the Cubs," Winn said. "Half of the people I met when I was little, I didn't even realize who they were. I was just goofing around and having fun. That's what it has always been about for me is having fun."

Being part of a baseball family is a unique situation that Winn has used to develop a knowledge of baseball. And while having the smarts to play baseball helps, WKU coach Joel Murrie said it ultimately comes down to ability.

"He knows the game of baseball, but just being from a baseball family will not make him a great baseball player," Murrie said. "I think this develops confidence."

Confidence is something Murrie said Winn displayed last fall during one of the coach's fall camps.

"We had interest in him last summer," Murrie said. "He played well last summer against good

See HOME, 4C



Miranda Peterson/Daily News
Kentucky Colonels middle infielder Dennis Winn will try his skills next season with coach Joel Murrie and the Toppers.

HOME, from 1C

competition, but seeing him in a camp environment was the deciding factor with me and my staff."

Winn said he was surprised when Murrie offered him the chance to play for Western.

"He called me into his office one day and I figured he was going to ask me what my plans were," Winn said. "I came in and they put an offer on the table.

That really gave me a boost to recognize that if they could see something in me, then I have the skills to play there. Coach Murrie is a great guy and I'm really excited to play for him."

"Coming from home school, I'm sure there will be an adjustment, but my parents have always taught me to work hard and that is what college is about – hard work."

And while Winn said it was an honor to be selected by the Phillies, he realized that there still was a lot to learn.

"I feel like I have a lot of progression to do as far as strength and knowledge of the game," Winn said. "I feel like I really need to be at Western this fall, so I'm looking forward to that. It's a really good program and I can see a lot of good things happening."